

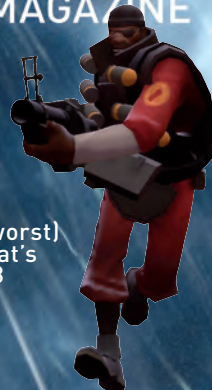
SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC PLAYSTATION XBOX WII MOBILE

**AULD
LANG
SYNE**

The best (and worst)
of 2007 and what's
cooking in 2008



LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER

UNDERWORLD

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IN TOMB RAIDER 8

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ASSASSIN'S CREED
NFS: PROSTREET
MID-RANGE
GRAPHICS CARDS
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THE LINE!**

Kaos Studios shows us
Frontlines: Fuel of War



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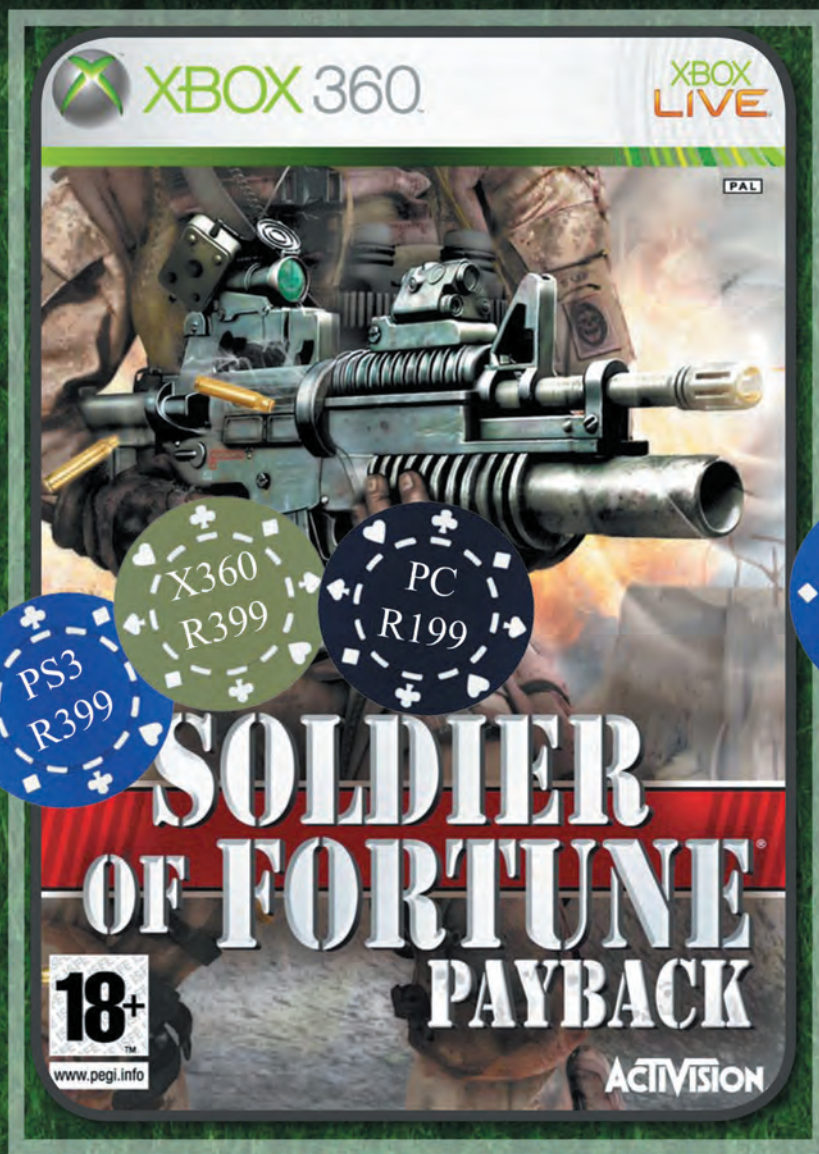
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If there's no DVD, just stare at Lara.
There, feel better?



GAMING
SHOULDN'T
BE A GAMBLE



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Wii





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Into the next generation

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 ▶ Hot Wheels: Beat That
 (65260) ▶ The Sims 2
 Castaway Stories (65271)

R199⁹⁵ EACH



R129⁹⁵

The Sims 2
 Free Time (65273)

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R219⁹⁵ EACH



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 ▶ Hot Wheels: Beat That (65262)

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**Battle for the Pacific
 - WWII
 Battles**
 (65257)

R399⁹⁵



Assorted Games
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 ▶ Battlefield Bad Company (65277) ▶ Fifa Street 3 (65276)



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Assorted Games

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- Hot Wheels: Beat That (65261)

R299⁹⁵ EACH



R499⁹⁵

Army of Two (63110)



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Dark Messiah of Might And Magic Elements (65250)



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Assorted Games

- Hot Wheels: Beat That (65263)
- Battle for the Pacific - WWII Battles (65259)

R299⁹⁵ EACH

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(63227)

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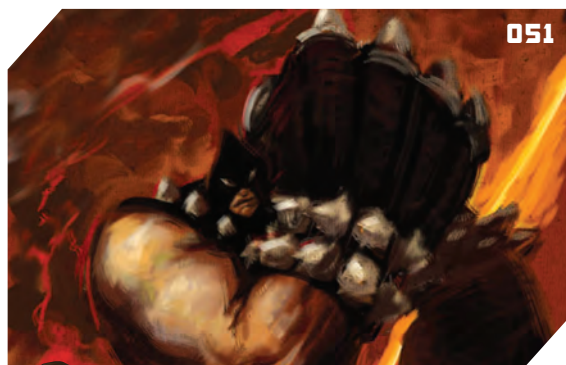
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 Synaesthete

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CheatBook Database 2008

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He who dies with the most toys is nonetheless dead.

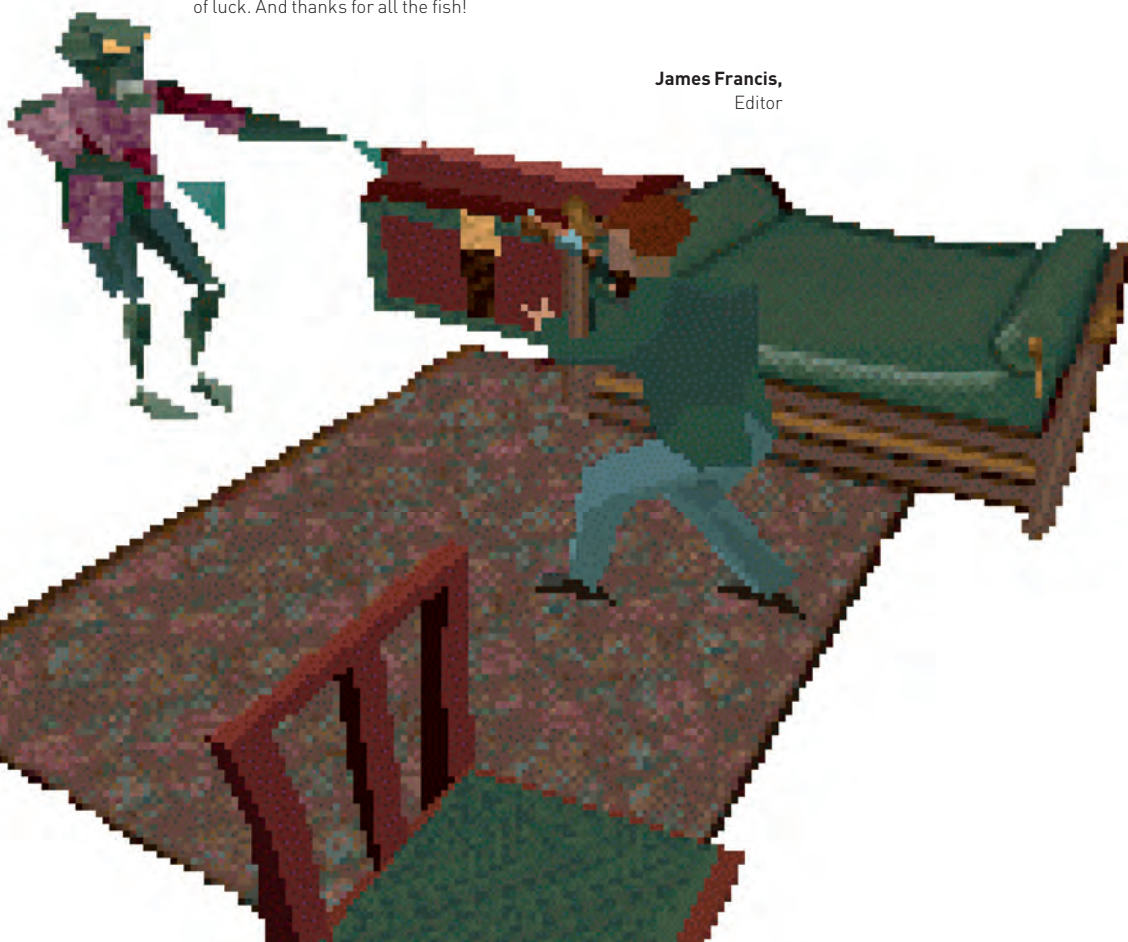
AS I SIT HERE writing this, I'm annoyed. I bought *Burnout Paradise*, which by all measures is a great game. All but one: the crash junctions have disappeared, now replaced with a minigame called Showtime. Essentially you roll your wreck down the road and hit as many cars as you can, but it's not the same. In *Crash Junction*, you hurled your car towards an intersection setup – the trick was to find the sweetest spot at the best speed to cause the most mayhem (not to mention a frikkin' big explosion that, in *Burnout: Revenge*, you could continuously pump for more bang). In comparison Showtime is just blunt action that requires little forethought.

Oh well, that just means I'll be playing *Revenge* more often. But I'm still playing *Paradise*. It's fun. Like I mentioned, I'm just annoyed at Criterion's decision. Plus, what else am I going to play? Nothing is being released!

In two issues we hit April – traditionally that means a redesign, but this will also be NAG's tenth birthday issue. Everyone has a few good ideas of what we can do for that issue, but we'll keep it a surprise for now (translation: we haven't decided yet).

Finally, we're bidding farewell to Anton "the_basilisk" Lines, whose writing has appeared in NAG for the past seven years. He has decided to explore other avenues since his move to the UK, so we wish him the best of luck. And thanks for all the fish!

James Francis,
Editor



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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Indren Naik

SUBJECT: 2008

2008 IS GOING TO be a year of change and victory for all techno dudes and 'dudets'. Why? You ask what nonsense is this 15-year-old talking about. Well, imagine this: a year when the oppressors of knowledge and digital freedom open their eyes and say, "Hey, maybe not everyone can afford to pay +/-R270 for ADSL." Yeah, per-gig is affordable with companies like Imaginet, but be reasonable: +/-R300 per month is a bit steep. Anyway, the rest of the year seems to be a good one with movies like *Iron Man* (well the trailer looks good), and it also seems that *GTA* will finally hit our shores. The one thing that really bugged me last year was all the nonsense about games being too violent and affecting people mentally. Come on! Who in their right state of mind plays a game and then decides to kill someone! To do such a thing that person must have been mental to begin with. For

2008, I hope that the god of games gets rid of this nonsense and releases *Manhunt* from its dungeon of psychological nonsense. For all the people who think the PS3 is still a bit too pricey: maybe 2008 will bring us the PS2 redesign to keep us happy. Guys your rock. The mag too, but hey, I guess you already knew that.

*You certainly sound positive! We like that, so we're going to reinforce positive behaviour by giving you a prize. Your letter had us nodding in agreement with practically ever well-put point. We too cannot wait for *GTA IV*. We also think that the violent gaming inspiring violence in real life is nonsense. We also believe that 2008 will be a year of change and - as you so eloquently put it - victory! Bravo! We could certainly do with more people who are willing to just put all the My Thing is better than Your Thing nonsense aside to better enjoy the finer things in life.*

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA South Africa. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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Cyber mail: letters@tidemedia.co.za

Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH

What do you think of region locking?

FROM: Brent Benade

SUBJECT: Giving false hope to the masses

LIKE EVERY OTHER SYCOPHANT who sends you mail, I will start by saying that you guys have a great magazine. Done. Now for my arbitrary complaint. It was suggested in the December issue that *NAG* include reader reviews. This sounds like a good idea, but let me assure you it isn't. The reason (I believe) why people read *NAG* is so that they can get an informed, expert opinion on whatever events or products are currently relevant in the gaming world. We trust your opinions and understand your tastes in the context of the reviews. Because we have a general idea who you are, we can interpret your reviews in a productive manner. By giving us reader reviews, you are in effect giving us nothing. We don't know the tastes of the writer or whether we agree or disagree with them, and it doesn't help us in deciding whether or not to purchase that product. It would be the same as walking up to a random person in the street and asking, "Hey, did you like *Crysis*?" It doesn't even give an accurate representation of popular opinion as the sample size is too small. In the end, the only thing it gives the reader is the small twinkling of false hope that says, "Yeah, I could work at *NAG* if I wanted too, even though I'm semi-illiterate and can't finish *Quake 4* on Easy." Does *NAG* seriously want to project this kind of message? Are we really just better off asking random people their opinion than people whose tastes and opinions we already understand and trust? I would like to think that reason will prevail and the valuable space and time will be used for something that's useful, or at least entertaining.

*You actually make a rather convincing argument. On the other hand, there's nothing wrong with giving someone a little bit of fame, is there? A bit like your letter appearing in *NAG* - now you have something to brag to your friends about. Think about it: having some reader reviews in the magazine may help remind people why they buy *NAG* in the first place. Nothing like a little point of reference to give people some perspective. That, and try not to think of the reader reviews*

as an attempt at an informative bit of writing, but rather something you can chuckle over until you realise you know the guy who wrote it. Then you can go beat him up for us.

FROM: Dann Verster

SUBJECT: Doh!

LOST MY COPY OF The Orange Box for my 360 :-|.

Sorry dude, haven't seen it. Where did you lose it? Check the dog.

FROM: Lloyd Schneck

SUBJECT: Wii think it sucks

AH YES, THE WII... *NAG* as well as the rest of the world has approached this platform with the utmost glee. I am officially standing up to this plague. They call it revolutionary but all it is, is a PS2 with some fancy motion sensing nunchucks... The PS3's SIXAXIS isn't much different. But what do we do? Give it stick, that's what! All the Wii makes you do is wave your hands around... Excuse me if I'm wrong, but didn't EyeToy do that? My nine-year-old little brother was playing it, and after about five minutes approached me and said, "That was so stupid." I had to agree with his undeniable logic. What I'm trying to say is that the Wii is the sorriest excuse for a console [all it's actually done is using lots of motion-sensing stuff in its games]. So, people of the world, please stop giving it such amazing glory, for it's only a technically degraded box with wavy thingies. Oh... um also keep up the great work with the mag.

Firstly, if you think that the SIXAXIS and the Wiimote are the same thing, it's obvious that you haven't looked at either except from behind the Perspex glass at the store. Secondly, you listened to the opinion of your nine-year-old brother who, by all accounts, thinks putting stuff up his nose is better than

girls. Lastly, we're sorry to hear that you don't like playing with your Wii. Somehow, that doesn't stop us from romping around the room playing virtual tennis, bowling and self-mutilation. More seriously, the Wii has an angle and much like the XaviXPORT console, that angle seems to be appealing enough. You may not like it, but the rest of the planet seems happy with it.

FROM: Drake

SUBJECT: Not everything has to look better

AS YOU CAN PROBABLY see from the title, this is going to be about graphics. I am going to use *Crysis* as a reference, but this should apply to most games and probably some applications (thinking XP vs. Vista). A lot of sites/blogs are complaining that even if your computer is way above the recommended specs for *Crysis* and everything is set to the max, the game is unplayable (below 30fps). Does that really matter? I played the game on a computer that has less than the recommended specs, and found it to be fun. Anyway, I was fiddling with the setting when I saw the physics setting was on low. So, thinking that this is mostly done by the CPU anyway and not the GPU, I cranked it up a bit. This is when the game really became fun - blow up a house and bits and pieces fly everywhere. That is only one example of the fun stuff that happens and has absolutely nothing to do with graphics. So, what's the point? Graphics isn't the be all and end all of games and shouldn't be. First and foremost, it should be fun to play, then everything else, and not the other way around. And when game developers and game players finally realise this, we might start getting originality back into games instead of the same stuff with better looks.

*We're not sure which Websites say that even if your computer is powerful, *Crysis**

Graphics isn't the be all and end all of games and shouldn't be. First and foremost, it should be fun to play, then everything else, and not the other way around.



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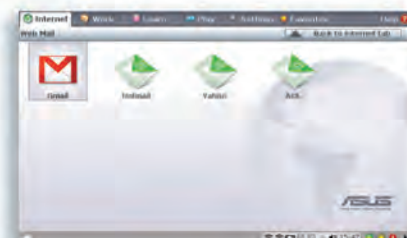
The Eee PC is Wi-Fi enabled so once you take it out of the box and turn it on, you're immediately connected. See how easy it already is? In the blink of an eye, the quick start-up brings you to the Graphical User Interface, with big icons as cute as they are comprehensive. Click on the web icon and you're there: the Internet.

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As if all this is not easy enough, the Eee PC preset favorites like Wikipedia and iGoogle. One-click access to resource sites – just the thing for curious minds and fact finders.

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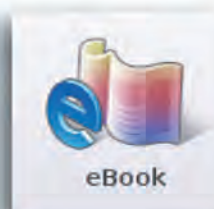
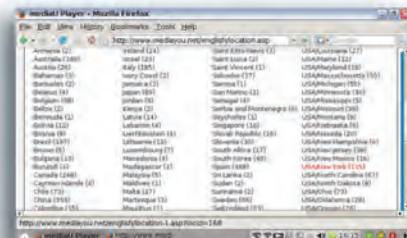


Skype is the limit

Skype too is pre-installed so you can start chatting right away, saving money while staying in touch. There's nothing quite as warm and intimate as an actual voice, so having Skype all set up offers a more personal option every time.

Listen to the world

With an extensive global radio list, the Eee PC lets you tune in to radio stations around the world. You can listen to your favorite songs, explore new sounds and even learn a new language. It's all there within earshot.



For the Ebookworm

Don't fret over hardcovers or paperbacks. Forget actual books, travel light with the Eee PC and download ebooks to read anytime anywhere. It's a small function, but it's precisely thoughtful little lifestyle features like these that make the Eee PC such a joy to use.

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: How many of your games do you actually finish? When do you give up? Are you a 100-percenter?

Bonezzmann: I never complete 100%. I finish the game, and then download a 100% game save. I finish all my games – don't really give up. Only game I haven't finished is Juiced, but it just sucked :)

Jub Jub: I'm a 100% person. I get upset if I don't finish games. The only time I don't finish games is when I have too much on my plate, but I get back to them a few months later.

XennoX: I love finishing games. It just feels more rewarding. It brings a certain kind of satisfaction.

Repline: With all the great releases we had, I find it difficult to finish all my games. However, I classify myself as a 100-percenter and as soon as I have time, I go and complete those that still need finishing.

Maniac790: I'm not really into the 100% thing. I don't like running around collecting little tokens. I just try finishing the game and if I'm bored, I'll go looking for the extras to get 100%.

Frozenfireside: I usually only complete games that keep my short attention span. I often lose interest in a game. I completed Rayman Raving Rabbids easily though. Want to get a Wii just for the second Rayman Raving Rabbids.

TriggerHappy: I normally finish my games 85% to 99%. I have never completed a game 100%.

Chainsaw Dude: I complete most games, but almost never 100%. I also hate games with alternate endings.

Darkmag: I finished Homeworld 2. Nuff said.

Chuluka: I used to finish games 100% but lately I haven't. Games like Dungeon Lords, Tomb Raider: Anniversary, Quake 4, Doom 3, S.T.A.L.K.E.R., Wolfenstein and COD. Bought all of them within the last six months and haven't had time to finish them all except for Dungeon Lords, which is so buggy it's not even funny.

Karuji: Normally, I finish my games. However, you get some games that reach the point where it's, "This is s**t, I'm never touching this game again."

brazed: I take my time to enjoy a game. Often a whole range of new titles will appear, which I just have to have, and I struggle to finish the game I'm currently busy with. So, with the incredible games released over the last few months, I haven't finished a lot of them with the exception of HL2: Episode 2 and Crysis – they are both exceptional titles. I lose interest in average titles. I've since decided to revisit a lot of those titles and finish them. I owe it to myself – they did cost me a bit of money after all.

Have your say on the NAG forums:
<http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>

Even a PS3 or Xbox 360 costs less than a top-of-the range PC if you look at the prices of some of the best graphics cards on the market.

is unplayable. Sounds like you need to stop visiting those Websites. Crysis runs just fine on a machine recommended on the back of the box – we've checked. You're right though: graphics has reached an apex and now it's up to developers to try new, different and interesting things aside from pushing more pixels into your hind-brain. Physics is wholly regarded as the 'next step' when it comes to the evolution of gaming, and after that it may well be the advancement of AI. As for originality, well... that's going to require a bit more: imagination – something, which in this climate of copycat games, is a little lacking. That, and the fact that really imaginative titles just don't sell. We hope you bought Psychonauts.

FROM: Ash

SUBJECT: Console will console me

I'M TIRED OF SEEING so many games released on consoles that will never make it to the PC. And yet, it isn't true for the reverse, as many games that are released for the PC are later put on the console, and they are usually accompanied with better graphics and other features that weren't present on the PC – like *Dark Messiah*.

There are many stalwart PC supporters, like my brother, who always has the argument, "Yes, but the PC is better. You can upgrade a PC, whereas with a console you have to go and buy a new one." I've been reading, and I have to disagree. Even a PS3 or Xbox 360 costs less than a top-of-the range PC if you look at the prices of some of the best graphics cards on the market. When I bought a new GPU, I had to upgrade

everything else as well. R4,500 spent, and you can get the Xbox 360 Elite for about the same price. Now, barely one and a half years later, my rig is outdated – probably a mid-spec at best. And another thing: a PlayStation has backwards compatibility. With a PC with XP or Vista installed, it's a nightmare to get old games to work.

Despite the pleas of PC owners to developers to port games from consoles to their archaic systems, they hardly ever listen. Sometimes people tease by saying, "It'll be available." Then later, usually on the developer or producer's Website, it'll state that it won't. I'm tired of having to comb the Net with a stupid dial-up connection looking for a patch or a driver.

So, to conclude: I'll use my PC for surfing the Net with a Closer option from Telkom, playing old games that were never released on any other contraption (but now will be, like LIVE Arcade, etc.), and typing. But for games, I have to say that the console is looking like a good option. Finally, *Mortal Kombat* – here I come!

Thankfully, the console vs. PC debate seems to finally be drawing to a close as the stalwart PC elitists are picked off by our snipers hidden in the underbrush. Personally, we like the PC for what it is: a powerful, multifaceted machine capable of doing lots of stuff as long as you give it the proper time, effort and money. We like consoles because you put in a game, and you play the game. There is no reason these two must be mutually exclusive, but don't tell someone who just spent R14,000 upgrading that – it may cause them to malfunction. **NAG**

BE AN ASSASSIN!

MEGAROM WAS KIND ENOUGH to provide NAG with some sweet *Assassin's Creed* figurines showing Altair being his usual moody bad-ass self, so we held a competition on the NAG Online Forums (<http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>) to see who was worthy of receiving such a bad-ass prize. Here are the three winners, in no particular order. Thanks to everyone who entered!



Mad Don McKilt



Shadowburn



Maniac790

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NEXT-GEN GAMES BURNING A HOLE IN YOUR POCKET?

WELL, THE DEVELOPMENT COSTS BURN HOLES IN THE OZONE LAYER

NEXT TIME YOU FEEL tempted to post a grumbling invective on our forums about the "inflated" price of new games, perhaps you might pause a moment to consider the costs incurred in producing them in the first place. Production isn't something that just magically happens with the flick of a sparkly wand: it's the sum total of design, programming, console and engine license fees, retail markups, marketing, publishing, and other miscellaneous costs.

Way back in 1982, a *Pac-Man* port arrived on the Atari 2600 to the tune of about \$100,000. It was also more or less guaranteed to be a colossal smash hit, largely because by that time everyone had worn down their *Breakout* cartridges to something roughly the size and shape of a melted Chomp.

Even adjusting for inflation in the intervening

years, the cost of game development has now spiralled wildly out of all proportion – *Gears of War* clocked in at \$10 million, *Halo 3* and *Stranglehold* around \$30 million, and the upcoming *Too Human* is rumoured to be budgeted at somewhere around an astonishing

Development cost: \$30 million



\$80-100 million for each instalment of a trilogy. Epic's Unreal Engine 3, chugging along behind the façade of many recent games, meanwhile, cost the company \$40 million over four years of development. Considering the volatile nature of a market choking on a massive influx of new titles, moreover, hefty financial investment in game development is a bit of a gamble.

"There's long-term rewards in this," says independent games industry analyst Nick Parker. "These products will last five or six or seven years and will increase the number of consoles out there, driving software sales. Obviously, at the moment, it's high risk, because there aren't so many consoles being sold. In the long term, there's the opportunity to get the money back. That's why we are in the business."

BLIZZARD WORKING ON A NEW MMO

BUT THAT DOESN'T SCARE BIOWARE...

AFTER A QUERY ON the official *World of Warcraft* forums about a new Blizzard job listing for a "Lead 3D Character Artist" for a purported "Next-Gen MMO", Blizzard Community Representative Drysc confirmed that Blizzard is in fact looking for employees for work on "an unannounced Next-Gen MMO".

Drysc specified that the new project will not be an expansion for *World of Warcraft*.

In an interview with GamelInformer, BioWare President Greg Zeschuk and CEO Ray Muzyka both admitted to being players and fans of *World of Warcraft*, but noted that "it's almost like having another job", saying that they are thinking of ways to make the genre more accessible and easier to "pick up and play and have fun".

Speaking to VideoGamer.com, *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* quest designer Joel Bylos believes that *World of Warcraft* is starting to lose appeal. "You get that just from online communities, which of course we all pay attention to as well", Bylos said when asked if people might be getting tired of *World of Warcraft*. "Yeah. There's definitely that feeling on the Internet."

He added: "But I think one mistake a lot of people make is they design a game to be *WoW* and *WoW* was successful on its own two legs and that's what *Conan* is going to do."

HMV: GAMES REPLACING CDS

IN MODERN TIMES, MUSIC has evolved through various distribution methods. It started with radio and vinyl albums and moved on to audio cassettes. After a while it finally reached CDs. It was hot property and music stores grew exponentially since vinyls. However, nowadays, music has found a new home in online distribution with MP3s. This was bad news for the music stores because it meant that every year, their CD sales declined by 10%. With this in mind, one of the UK's largest chain stores, HMV, has decided to switch focus. They will now no longer focus on music CDs but rather on videogaming. This news follows the launch of their first gaming LAN centre in London. CEO of HMV, Simon Fox, stated that games and technology were high-growth areas and that HMV would try and become a magnet to gamers to come, play and buy. While this is bad news for the music industry, it is excellent news for gamers in the UK.



Development cost: \$100,000





IS CRYSIS CONSOLE- BOUND YET?

WHEN CERVAT YERLI ANNOUNCED that a console version of the game *Crysis* hinged on its PC counterpart, people started to expect the best. However, no one ever expected *Crysis* to perform badly on the market. But it did, selling just over 86,000 units in the United States after its launch in November. Hence *Crysis*'s console dreams seem to be evaporating quickly. Even if by some small chance *Crysis* was to make it onto consoles, would they be able to run it on the highest specs? At the

moment, most PCs with high-end performance ratings have trouble running the game on maximum settings. EA, the publishers of the game, has also stated that it has no plans to bring it out onto consoles. However, it is not all bad news, *Far Cry 2*, is slated for release sometime this year and will launch on PC, 360 and PS3.

OBESITY: MCDONALD'S POINTS AT GAMES

IT MIGHT SEEM LIKE a case of serious irony when McDonald's blames something else for the growing number of obese children, especially First World countries. The story was quickly sensationalised across the myriad of gaming Websites – McDonald's, after all, should be the last to play the blame game when it comes to people getting fat. But the quote, which came from McDonald's UK CEO Steve Easterbrook, was more intended to talk about the general problem with today's lifestyle.

"There's a lifestyle element: there's fewer green spaces and kids are home playing computer games on the TV when in the past they'd have been burning off energy outside." McDonald's is currently working on reshaping its image, having made several big changes to its recipes, and clearly it feels it's not the only one to blame for the obesity problem.

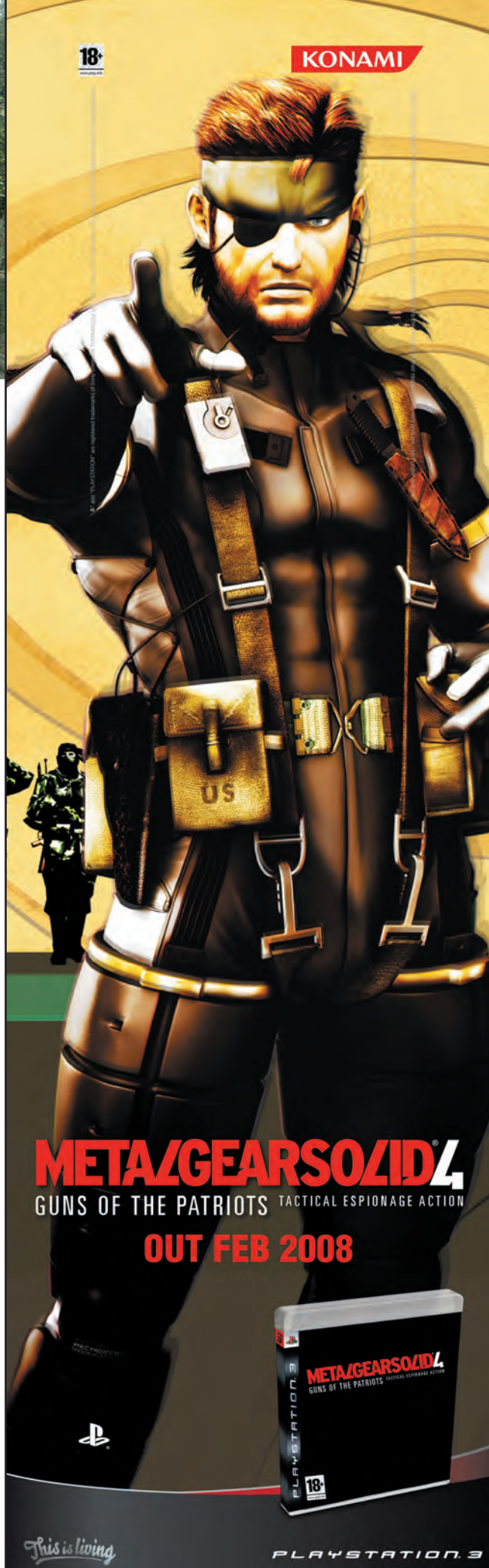
The American Beverage Association, riling from radical pricing ideas for high-sugar drinks proposed by San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom, also said the problem is not that simple and ABA spokesperson Kevin Keane said that if the mayor was serious about fighting fat, he should take on computer and videogame companies, which Keane said lured children inside when they should "be outside burning calories."

In other news, Wii Fit sold over a million units. Go figure.



WARREN SPECTOR MIGHT RETIRE

It was sad news when it was announced that Warren Spector will have nothing to do with the third instalment of *Deus Ex*, even though he is the creator of it. Unfortunately, for the gaming community, this is not the worst of it. In a recent interview, Warren Spector announced that he doubts he will make more than three games before he retires. He did, however, say that in the ideal world that number would be five. He cites that creating a game takes extreme amounts of focus and time, two things he is tired of. Is this because he was not able to create a game based on *The Golden Compass*? Apparently he was heartbroken when he found out a movie and game was in development before he had the chance to climb in. Spector has however stated that, while we might be shocked by this news now, when his next game comes out, hardcore gamers might vilify him. This game is set to be released by Disney.



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OUT FEB 2008



This is living

PLAYSTATION 3

SNIPPETS

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

A US gamer and modder was paid a visit by the FBI after the agency discovered he was trying to **build a nuclear reactor**. Agents confiscated his project. See, sometimes having the ultimate PSU will get you into trouble.



Spore developer Soren Johnson reckons **PC games should be like punk music**. "For me, PC gaming should be like Punk Rock - being able to do whatever you want." What, like pirate the games? That's pretty punk...



The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences has **awarded Nintendo an Emmy** for the Wii's motion-sensing tech and the DS's dual-screens and touch features. Atari also got an award - for the Lynx, a console from way back when.



College football quarterbacks from LSU and Tennessee State are going high-tech to get their training in. The teams train on a virtual system that uses **custom versions of EA's Madden and NCAA engines**. Each version reflects the team's plays as well as those of their opponents.



ACTIVISION AND BLIZZARD GO STEADY

ACTIVISION AND VIVIENDI TO FORM WORLD'S BIGGEST PUBLISHER AND DESTROY TOKYO

BY MID 2008, **ACTIVISION** and Vivendi will join forces, combine strengths and create the biggest gaming publisher since Electronic Arts ate everyone else. Vivendi bought 52 percent of shares in Activision and the two will trade under the newly formed name of Activision Blizzard. The deal is reportedly worth \$18.9 billion. Activision stock rose 17.4 percent in response to the news, while Vivendi stock rose 2.7 percent.

Comments on the merger from the industry: Analyst Colin Sebastian of Lazard Capital Markets believes the combination to be strategically a good fit, with complementary product portfolios and business models; Blizzard does not anticipate any difference in their own operations as a result of the merger, SEGA of America president and COO Simon Jeffery believes that any competition to EA is good for

the industry (and notes that for the first time in our lives there is a new number one publisher); while Electronic Arts UK boss Keith Ramsdale believes that EA still has the industry's strongest portfolio of game franchises but adds that "we're always at our best when we have a clearly defined competitor".

Perhaps, if we're lucky, we'll see *World of Tony Hawk Craft*, *Guitar Hero: Aliens vs. Predator* or *Call of Crash Bandicoot: Cortex Commando*.



EGM SNUBBED BY STROPPY PUBLISHERS

In a recent editorial, *Electronic Gaming Monthly* editor-in-chief Dan Hsu revealed that Midway, Sony, and Ubisoft are withholding press assets, apparently in retaliation for unfavourable coverage in the magazine.

"Gamemakers have been taking issue with our reviews for as long as EGM's been around. It goes with the territory: Be honest and tough with your critics, and you're going to piss just about everybody off at some point," he wrote on his blog over at lup.com. "For the time being, you'll get little, late, or no

coverage of the following products: anything *Mortal Kombat* (they didn't like our reviews), anything from Sony's sports department (ditto), and now, anything from Ubisoft (it seems our coverage of *Assassin's Creed* was the last straw). So in case you're wondering why you're seeing so little of these games in our magazines and on our Websites, now you know."

This follows December's Gamespot scandal, with longtime Senior Editor Jeff Gerstmann's controversial dismissal, allegedly for his unflattering review of *Kane & Lynch*.



THEY SAID IT...

We certainly like the games, [but] it's almost like having another job.

Ray Muzyka, BioWare founder, on *World of Warcraft*

I'm going to be vilified. I'm going to be accused of selling out, yet again. It's going to be glorious. Just glorious.

Warren Spector on what he predicts hardcore gamers will think of his new game

"I don't think there are many games that tackle violence head on. When you hit someone or inflict pain, faces get disfigured, for example, and I want to make games that show that sort of thing."

Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima in a recent *Famitsu* interview

"It would have been beautiful and I must tell that's a... of anything in my life that I look back and wish it could have happened is that project, because it is such a powerful experience."

Pan's Labyrinth director Guillermo del Toro talking about the canceled *Halo* movie

"Mass Effect 2 has to, has to come to the PlayStation 3. I wouldn't be shocked if Mass Effect 1 came to the PS3."

Gaming analyst Michael Pachter speculates on the RPG game after EA bought BioWare/Pandemic

WEIRD & WICKED

THE DARK UNDERBELLY OF GAMING STORIES

Talk about game rage. An 18-year-old guy in Bilbao, Spain, lost it and tried to strangle his dad with the controller cable. Apparently he was very involved in an intense gaming session and when, after several requests, he ignored his father's warnings to stop, the dad unplugged his controller. Rage ensued, but the mother intervened. The son was arrested.



Thought you got a rotten gift. A 13-year-old boy from California opened his Christmas present – a new PlayStation 3 – only to discover a phone book inside. Fortunately the parents kept the receipt.



Experiencing family problems? This came from a police report of a shooting in the US: "The boy wanted his father to look at his Xbox 360 videogame system. The father didn't want to. An argument ensued. The boy handed his father a rifle. Shoot me, he said." The 17-year-old ended up in the hospital with a head wound and the father has been arrested on a variety of charges.



How do you deal with a bully? A 17-year-old Beijing kid retaliated for losing a fight by pouring fuel over the offender and setting him alight. The victim survived with 55% burn wounds. The burner's excuse? He apparently transformed into a Fire Mage from *World of Warcraft* to get the job done. Mages use matches?



Careful what you say while gaming! A 20-year-old Washington man was arrested after threatening to rape a 15-year-old girl who he met on Xbox LIVE. It was the end of a stint of pretty obsessive behaviour. Meanwhile, a 19-year-old from Frostburg State University, during a *COD4* match, spoke about "shooting up the school". Another player reported it to the police and the student was tracked down and could face jail time.



ARNIE AVOIDS CONAN GAME

IT IS NO BIG secret that California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger helped build fame and fortune (and possibly his political career) on the back of the 1982 film *Conan the Barbarian*. He's currently fighting for a law to restrict the sale of violent videogames, which would affect the upcoming THQ ultra-violent *Conan* game as well. The ABC7 Sacramento news team asked the Governor's office how he feels about the game.

"The *Conan* character existed far before the governor portrayed him in the movies, and it still exists in different forms of entertainment," said Aaron McLeer, the governor's press secretary. "The governor has no association with that game."

Schwarzenegger signed California's videogame law into effect in 2005, but the law was overturned earlier this year on constitutional grounds, which Schwarzenegger has vowed to appeal. The matter is currently under consideration by the US Circuit Court.



BIOSHOCK 2: THE FALL OF RAPTURE?

Following universal critical acclaim, sales in excess of two million, and several prestigious Game of the Year awards (The angels love us, Mr Bubbles!), a sequel to *BioShock* was as inevitable as a single, curious harvesting of a Little Sister leading to full-blown ADAM addiction.

Apparently tipped off by a 2K insider, Czech gaming site hrej.cz claims that a prequel-type sequel chronicling Rapture's descent into gene-spliced pandemonium has entered pre-production, and is set for a 2009 release. In the meantime, however, Hollywood big daddies are reportedly humming and having over a 300-style green screen film adaptation of the subaquatic epic.



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Get to toy with the Sim game that started them all. The source code for **SimCity** is available online at www.donhopkins.com/home/micropolis/ (Micropolis was the game's original project name.)

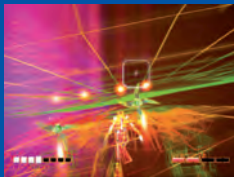
SCI, Eidos' parent company, has ended take-over talks with other parties and decided to go it alone. As a result, the new **Tomb Raider** as well as three under announced titles have been delayed.



Was **Halo's** Warthog an inspiration for the new **Hummer HX** concept SUV? Fanboys would love that, but the motor company denied this. Maybe it's just the colour scheme...



An educational psychologist at CES warned that **kids under the age of seven should not play video games**. According to research she cited, games might rewire a child's brain to prefer 'fight or flight' responses to rational thought.



The cult classic **Rez** is making its way to the 360's LIVE Arcade, but what about the infamous Rez trance vibrator thing? Apparently the new version will allow you to hook up the three other 360 controllers and they will vibrate to the game as well. Rez, the game you and your girlfriend (and now, multiple wives) can play!



Valve has bought **Turtle Rock**, the team working on zombie shooter **Left 4 Dead**. Maybe now it will actually be completed and released.

DEATHSPANK: "MONKEY ISLAND MEETS DIABLO"

OLD-SCHOOL GAMERS EXPLODE WITH DELIGHT

HAVING PREVIOUSLY COLLABORATED WITH their Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness, former LucasArts prodigy Ron Gilbert has finally



accepted the plush leather chair of Creative Director over at

Hothead Games in Canada. Not only is this an epic win for Hothead, it also means that Gilbert's long-planned episodic RPG/adventure project *DeathSpank* has finally secured a development squad. Described in a rather eccentric press release as "Monkey Island meets *Diablo*", the game "follows the thong-tastic adventures of a misguided hero named DeathSpank". Hey, we'd hit that.

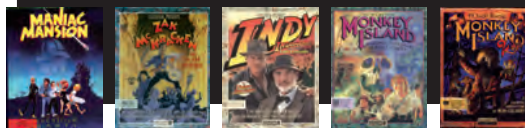
"I've spent over four years trying to find the right publisher for this strange little game," Gilbert announced. "Everyone hated it. But the weird thing is the more publishers that turned it down, the more convinced I became that this was a great idea. Every rejection fuelled me with excitement and the knowledge that I was right. Now that I've done it, you just know that somewhere four horsemen are saddling up."

DeathSpank was previously the starring character in a bizarre 20-second Flash cartoon cobbled together by Gilbert and his pal Clayton Kauzlaric. *DeathSpank Episode 1: Orphans of Justice* will be out "soonish".



5 REASONS WHY RON GILBERT RULES

- Maniac Mansion (1987)
- Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders (1988)
- Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989)
- The Secret of Monkey Island (1990)
- Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (1991)



FREE GAME OF THE MONTH

THE LAST STARFIGHTER [ON THE DVD]

Greetings, Starfighter. You have been recruited by the Star League to defend the frontier against Xur and the Ko-Dan armada.

IF YOU'VE NEVER SEEN *The Last Starfighter* you're missing out on one of the greatest videogame movies ever conceived. Released in 1984, and one of the earliest films to use extensive computer graphics, *The Last Starfighter* involves a teenager living in a trailer park in the middle of nowhere, being recruited into an intergalactic war via an arcade machine. The intrepid indie developers of Rogue Synapse (www.roguesynapse.com)

have actually gone and created the game from the movie and released it for free: so now even you can be a Starfighter. It's impossible to play with the keyboard, so try to use a joystick or gamepad with dual analogues. Naturally, the graphics aren't mind-blowing, because it's supposed to be an arcade game from 1984, so try to bear with it. It's actually not a bad game for something made to be a movie plot device.



THE EVOLUTION OF: STREET FIGHTER



Street Fighter (1988)



Street Fighter II (1992)



Street Fighter Alpha (1995)



Street Fighter III - 3rd Strike (1997)



Street Fighter Alpha 3 (1998)



Street Fighter EX 2 Plus (1998)



Street Fighter IV (2008)





MOVERS AND SHAKERS

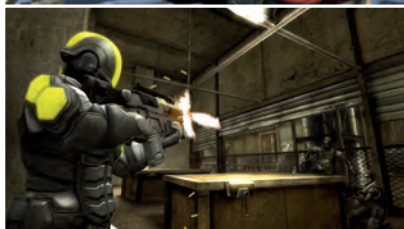
A post on the Neogaf forums claims that **Resistance: Fall of Man 2** will be released around October this year.

• Loved **Uncharted**? Well, this might be obvious, but good news: Naughty Dog is already working on the sequel. • **Call of Duty 5** and **Guitar Hero IV** have been confirmed as in development by Activision. The company revealed this in a fact sheet about franchises current on the burner. The **Bond** game and a new **Tony Hawk** title are also mentioned.

• Kicking orcs is fun! **Dark Messiah: Elements**, the 360 version of the PC game, will be released in early February. • Ubisoft announced that, apart from the PC, **Far Cry 2** will also be heading to the 360 and PS3. But the game will only be out somewhere after April. • **Tom Clancy's EndWar** and the next **Brothers in Arms** game will appear in Ubisoft's 08 fiscal year, which is anything between April this year and next. • Wii owners will be able to get their swordplay fix once **Red Steel 2** is released. The game is rumoured to be due this year. • You'll have to wait a bit longer for some psychopath hunting. Horror game **Condemned 2** has been delayed to March. • Zombie team shooter **Left 4 Dead** will apparently not make its Q1 2008 release date. Instead, we'll have to wait for somewhere around August this year.

• Lionhead's Peter Molyneux, talking about upcoming RPG **Fable 2**, noted that the game will be released in "late 2008". • SEGA's **Football Manager 2008** will be heading to the 360 in March this year. • It's barely been announced and the new **Tomb Raider** game, **Underworld**, has already been delayed to Q4 08. • The super-hard **Ninja Gaiden** is heading to Nintendo's DS. **Ninja Gaiden Dragon Sword** will be in 3D and out in March this year. • EA is expanding its Sims line with two new titles: **The Sims Carnival Bumper Blast** and **The Sims Carnival Snap City**. One is a puzzle game in the tradition of Peggles while the other is some sort of Tetris-like affair. • May the frantic, turn-based combat begin! 360 JRPG **Lost Odyssey**, from the makers of **Blue Dragon**, will be out in February. • When will **Alan Wake** arrive? According to a Microsoft memo, some time this year. But developer Remedy is of the opinion that we'll have to wait until 2009. • Get ready to roll around in psychedelic glee. **Beautiful Katamari** is heading to shelves in February. • The PS3's build-your-own-world experience, **LittleBigPlanet**, will be ready by September this year. • The other Diablo, **Sacred**, has had its sequel in the works for a while now. But developer Ascaron says we have to be more patient – the game will only be out by September. • The topsy-turvy release schedule of PS3 shooter **Haze** has done its thing again. According to US retailers, the game has been delayed to March. • Sudden Strike developer Fireglow Games plans to release an expansion for **Sudden Strike 3** in April, as well as extra free content. • EA has unveiled **Sim City 2 DS**. The city-building sim will take players through different time periods. No release date yet.

• Rockstar's cheeky game **Bully** will finally arrive on other platforms. The 360 and Wii versions are due in March.



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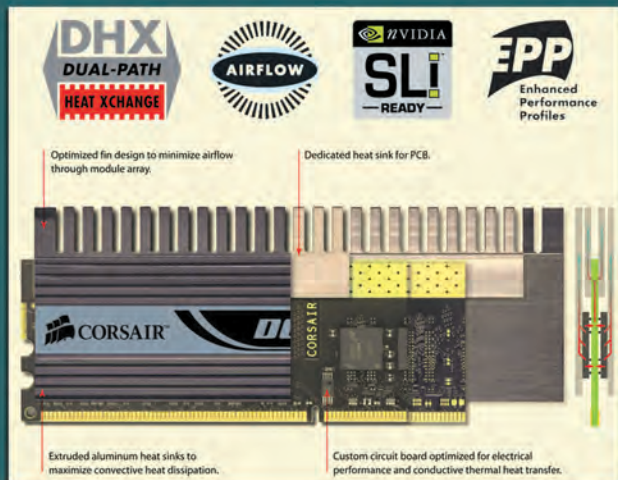
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Team Bondi's **L.A. Noir** might not be a PS3 exclusive after all. Several sites spotted that the developer has posted an ad on industry site Gamasutra for a lead animator, listing both platforms as part of the details.

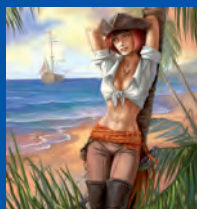


Are you one of those people who consider **Metal Gear Solid**'s musings as deep or dribble? If you're inclined to the former, a professor from a Texas university is apparently starting a philosophy course that incorporates the game's famously long and convoluted plots.



Want a greener PC? Apparently **Fujitsu** has cut down on all kinds of things Al Gore would be proud of with its Biblo PC. It's a normal notebook, except that 50% of the casing consists of corn that was converted to a polymer. No, you can't eat it.

According to online reports, Kristin Kreuk a.k.a. Lana Lang from Smallville, will be taking on the role of **Chun-Li** in the new **Street Fighter** movie. She probably didn't see the last one...



A complicated legal battle over online gambling has resulted in the Caribbean nation of Antigua and Barbuda being allowed to **waive US copyright laws**. That means that any games, movies, music and such are now free game in the island states.

Sin City developer **Red Mile** has licensed the **Unreal Engine 3** for the upcoming game based on the comics and movie.



ASSEMBLY SUMMER 2007

THE YEARLY GATHERING OF DELICIOUS PIXELS YIELDS RESULTS

ASSEMBLY SUMMER 2007 (2 August 2007 – 5 August 2007) was held in Helsinki, Finland. ASSEMBLY is a competition for programmers, artists, musicians, etc. but aimed specifically at digital creations. Here are the winners of the Demo (formerly known as Megademo) category, which is essentially known for being the "gamers' music video" - creations that blend programming, music and visual style to unearth something different and unique. Most of the winning entries are on this month's **NAG** Cover DVD, so you can check them out for yourself. Note: most of these megademos require a hefty PC to run smoothly, as they push the envelope on graphics. The winning Megademo, **LifeForce**, can be seen as a video (also on the DVD) if your PC isn't strong enough to run it.

- 1st LifeForce by Andromeda Software Development
- 2nd STS-06: Microdots by Synesthetics
- 3rd media error by cncd, fairlight and orange
- 4th evoid droid by excess process
- 5th f07 by Conspiracy
- 6th TiVi by Dope
- 7th The Chasm by Division
- 8th Break Dance not Hearts by Time Scratchers
- 9th Helium Copper by wAMMA
- 10th The Inner Flame by Adapt

If you don't understand what the fuss is about, try to think of them as non-interactive games trying to make love to your sense of style.

SID MEIER GETS AN AWARD

It seems fairly ironic that a game developer who probably has a good few years of doing just that ahead of him should be awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award, but this is exactly what Sid Meier is being honoured with.

The executive director of the Game Developers Conference, Jamil Moledina, explained that "Sid Meier has served as one of our industry's greatest role models for more than 25 years, creating fun and intelligent games for a diverse public long before it was popular," and added that "Now that the rest of the industry is actively targeting the broader audience, it's fitting to honour him with our highest award and thank him for his continuing example of inspiration for the videogame community."

Sid Meier, *Civilization* and *Pirates!* developer, will be receiving his award at the Game Developers Choice awards, held in conjunction with the Independent Games Festival, on February 20, in San Francisco this year.

DAVID JAFFE: A ONE CONSOLE FUTURE

God of War and *Twisted Metal* designer, David Jaffe has certainly stirred the pot by coming out in favour of "one unified hardware platform" in a recent blog entry. Although he admitted that "One game publisher would be bad. One giant game developer would be bad. I get how those things would hurt gamers," Jaffe argued that the benefits of a single standard console, that of massive content choice, would outweigh the loss of features through lack of competition.

Joystiq.com were quick to play "devil's advocate" and countered Jaffe's argument, which focuses on the success of the VHS and DVD, with a few comments: "The current competitive system allows for thousands of games to be produced every year, the wide majority of them for multiple platforms. Yes, it might suck for the developer to have to port one version of a game to multiple systems, but middleware tools are making that process increasingly streamlined."



GAMING CHARTS

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PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Assassin's Creed
- 2 Uncharted: Drake's Fortune
- 3 Blazing Angels II: Secret Missions of WWII
- 4 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 5 Kane & Lynch: Dead Men

XBOX 360

- 1 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 2 Assassin's Creed
- 3 Mass Effect
- 4 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 5 Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 High School Musical: Sing It!
- 2 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 3 Sims 2 Castaway
- 4 Pro Evolution Soccer 2008
- 5 Crash of the Titans

PC

- 1 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 2 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 3 SimCity Societies
- 4 Crysis
- 5 The Orange Box

PSP

- 1 ATV Offroad Fury 4
- 2 Sims 2 Castaway
- 3 Ben 10: Protector of Earth
- 4 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 5 The Simpsons



November figures provided by GfK
www.gfsa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 2 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 3 FIFA 08
- 4 Motorstorm
- 5 Resistance: Fall of Man

XBOX 360

- 1 Assassin's Creed
- 2 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 3 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 4 Halo 3
- 5 Project Gotham Racing 4

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 2 FIFA 08
- 3 Gran Turismo 4
- 4 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 5 Need for Speed: Underground

PC

- 1 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 2 Crysis
- 3 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 4 Hellgate: London
- 5 The Witcher

PSP

- 1 Sims 2 Castaway
- 2 FIFA 08
- 3 Daxter
- 4 Tekken: Dark Ressurrection
- 5 Need for Speed: Carbon



CONSOLE WATCH

CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Jack Tretton, has **gone on record to state that many consumers don't understand the PlayStation 3's capabilities** and that the PlayStation Network doesn't need improvement to compete with Xbox LIVE. He also promised that PlayStation Home would be "like nothing seen before." He admitted to "missteps" at console launch. Sony Corporation CEO, Howard Stringer, says that PlayStation 3 high-end games are infinitely more fun, demanding and exciting than Wii games. Sony has made *Fortune's* annual "101 Dumbest Moments in Business" list twice due to the dead goat and Manchester Cathedral incidents. Sony believes the PlayStation 3 may become profitable this year. • CEO of Square Enix, Yoichi Wada, claims that **Microsoft is the only current platform holder who remains dedicated to the gaming market**: he believes the Wii is a toy and that Sony is unsure what they made when they made the PlayStation 3. He wants Sony to clearly define their console. • Speaking at CES, Microsoft representative, Albert Penello, confirmed that the recent **Xbox LIVE downtime and connectivity issues were caused by a massive surge in LIVE signups**. He also admitted that outage length was compounded due to reduced Xbox LIVE staff over the holidays. • Also speaking at CES, **Microsoft chief, Bill Gates, called the Xbox 360 the most reliable console on the market**. He mentioned that while Microsoft had to apologise to users about the failure rate, they still managed to replace all the failed units for free. Bill also predicts that the mouse and keyboard will become obsolete in the face of voice and touch systems. He also declared that downloads are the future of media, but not high-definition physical media.

• **Microsoft has said that it would consider creating a Blu-ray player add-on for the Xbox 360** and that it isn't at all bothered by Warner Bros.' decision to go with Blu-ray instead of HD DVD. Albert Penello told Reuters that the format wars wouldn't have a significant impact on the Xbox 360 versus the PlayStation 3. • **Angry Xbox LIVE players in Texas have filed a lawsuit against Microsoft for the Xbox LIVE outages over Christmas**. They claim the platform holder has misrepresented itself and breached its contract through negligence. They're hoping for a \$5 million payout in compensation. Shortly after the outages, Microsoft confirmed that it would be offering a free unspecified Xbox LIVE Arcade game as an apology. • In the face of the format wars, **Microsoft has denied that it plans to release an Xbox 360 model with a built-in HD DVD player**. • **The Scottish Government has bought in-game advertising space on Xbox LIVE** to promote its latest campaign against drunk driving. The ads will appear on virtual billboards in certain games, all part of Microsoft's in-game advertising revenue system. • Microsoft representatives told one user that his **cooling-fan modification on the Xbox 360 was in violation of the terms of agreement**, and that Microsoft reserved the right to ban the user from Xbox LIVE. • Due to shortages, **MDB Capital Group analyst, James Lin, believes Nintendo may have missed out on \$1.3 billion in sales over the holiday period**. • Albert Penello, who is popular in this month's Console Watch, believes that **Microsoft won't be releasing any more backwards-compatibility updates**.

• Gaming magazine *EGM* claims that a **secret first-party Xbox 360 game has been scrapped and moved to the next Xbox**, leading to rumours about an 'Xbox 3'. • **The first user-created Unreal Tournament III content has arrived** in the form of a deathmatch map, which can be transferred to the PS3 via a USB memory stick.

XBOX LIVE



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COMPETITION

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We've got a copy of the nuclear-tastic multiplayer game *DEFCON* (which scored 90%, pg. 82, October 2006) to give away to the person with the best *DEFCON* strategies. But if you don't have *DEFCON*, how can you have strategies? You'll find the full LAN and Internet multiplayer-capable demo on our Cover DVD this month, with which to formulate those winning moves. The demo lets up to two people play against each other, or you can add an AI opponent to play against offline (the full game permits six-player games with any number of AI filling up the slots and teams). Demo players can even join games hosted by retail copies, but only one demo player can be on the server.

To share your strats and stand the chance to win a full copy of *DEFCON*, head over to this thread [<http://forums.tidemediaco.za/nag/showthread.php?t=2810>] on the NAG Online forums and show us your ICBM-fu!

The second-place runner-up will receive a full copy of *Darwinia*, Introversion's genre-busting second game.

Competition closes February 29, so you've got time. *DEFCON* includes Uplink, Introversion's first game!

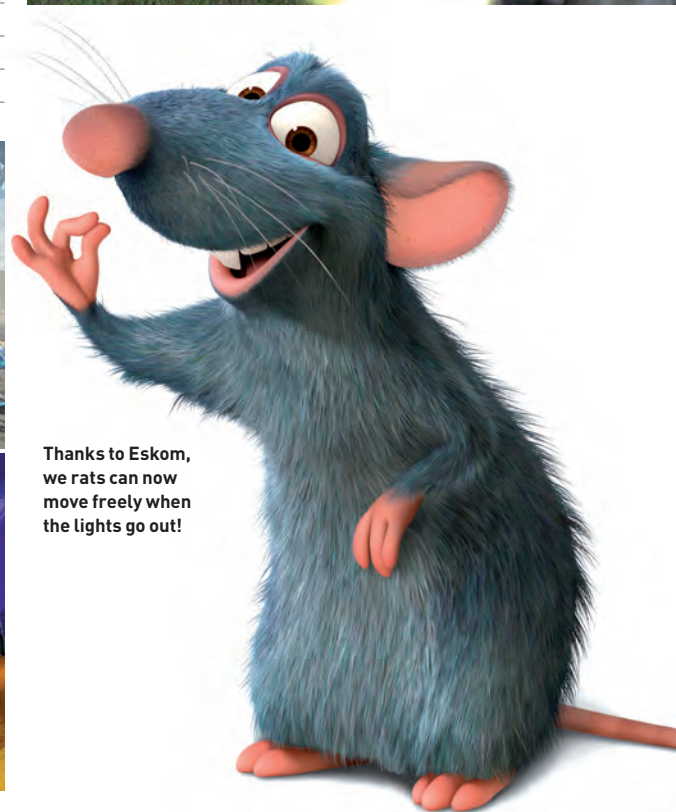
DEFCON (as well as *Darwinia*) is now available on shelves in good gaming stores, for those of you who didn't want to buy it online or off Steam.

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY RELEASES

Subject to change

Day	Game	Platforms
1	Cars Mater-National	Wii
1	Clever Kids: Dino Land	PS2, PC, DS
1	Clever Kids: Pony World	PS2, PC, DS
1	Cricket Captain 2007	PC
1	Generation of Chaos	PSP
1	Heracles: Battle with the Gods	DS
1	Heracles: Chariot Racing	PS2
1	Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom	360
1	Operation Air Assault 2	PS2, PC
1	Spectral vs. Generation	PSP
1	StateShift	PSP
1	They Came From The Skies	PS2, PC
1	Universe At War	PC
15	The Club	360, PC, PS3
15	Turok	360, PC, PS3
22	Avatar: The Burning Earth	360, Wii
22	Bratz Super Babyz	DS, PC
22	Condemned 2: Bloodshot	360, PS3
22	Disney Princess: Enchanted Journey	DS
22	Ratatouille: Food Frenzy	DS
22	SpongeBob's Atlantis SquarePantis	DS, Wii
29	Lost Odyssey	360



Thanks to Eskom, we rats can now move freely when the lights go out!



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Release list and special offers provided by www.kalahari.net

GAMING HISTORY 101 – FEBRUARY

1	9		25
2	10	18 [1984] Nintendo releases the shooter Wild Gunman for the NES.	26
	11	19 [1998] EA signs up Tiger Woods to endorse its golf games for the next four years.	
4	12	20 [2002] Immersion sues Microsoft and Sony over the rumble in their controllers.	28 [2008] March NAG on shelf
	13	21 [2003] SEGA merges with pachinko machine manufacturer Sammy.	
6	14		
	15	23	
	16	24 [2000] Microsoft reveals the Xbox when it registers www.xbox.com .	

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject [February Caption].



FEBRUARY CONTEST
NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT: "The Biker Build-off took a nasty turn."



JANUARY WINNER
Darwin's evolution: Ape – homo erectus – young lady obsessed with all things hot – aging woman obsessed with youth
– Dave Loubser

vivendi GAMES

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!



WE NEED A HERO

Every month, in honour of our favourite TV show, *Heroes*, we'll hide the mysterious mark of the heroes somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [Heroes February]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win an *All-Star Superman* graphic novel valued at R199 from Cosmic Comics!



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Jenelle Hendey, p62



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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

A DECADE OF DISCOVERY

"In many ways, the work of a critic is easy. We risk very little yet enjoy a position over those who offer up their work and their selves to our judgment.

We thrive on negative criticism, which is fun to write and to read. But the bitter truth we critics must face is that, in the grand scheme of things, the average piece of junk is more meaningful than our criticism designating it so. But there are times when a critic truly risks something, and that is in the discovery and defence of the new."

- Anton Ego, *Ratatouille*

LISTEN. THE POINT I'M going to make is that NAG is one of the finest gaming magazines in the world. Overseas gaming magazines are mostly crap. Gaming Websites are generally crap. Yes, the Websites get the news, reviews and previews first. Yes, the international magazines get big scoops and call themselves the best in the world. Gaming Websites and magazines, especially those in America, tend to sacrifice quality to be **first with the goodies**. The aforementioned magazines are often biased and are known to bend over for advertisers. The Websites are no different.

There are exceptions of course. The only publication I trust about as far as I can throw it is the UK-based multi-format magazine *Edge*. The reviews in *Edge* may be hit or miss depending on the reviewers who wrote them, but I don't mind. A review is just an additional opinion. A ballot in your box. A bullet in your gun. A little bit more info with which to make an informed judgement. What makes *Edge* worth it is the low signal-to-noise ratio. Basically, there's more signal and very little noise. *Edge* actually cares about what they say - not how quickly they can say it before the other guy.

It should come as no surprise that *Edge* is a role model for NAG and its staff.

Websites of the gaming variety have a very high signal-to-noise ratio. Far too much noise for my personal taste. The Websites care only about being first - often to the detriment of the facts. My personal exception to this is GameTrailers.com. Because GameTrailers is mostly game footage with voice-overs, gamers are less likely to be given the wrong idea. If a game looks good in the hands-on video that shows the first 30 minutes of gameplay, it's easy to reach four when adding two and two together.

Many gamers are content with getting their gaming fix from Websites. Websites are mostly free. They're first. Those with the bandwidth to view the videos, look at the screenshots and load the Flash-heavy pages are happy with quantity over quality. Good for them. I don't mind. Nevertheless, they are not more important than those who believe that **you get what you pay for**.

Nothing is **actually** free online. Even GameTrailers.com has copious amounts of advertising, which you are forced to download and watch. It's obvious that NAG doesn't suffer from too much advertising. NAG doesn't sacrifice pages that would otherwise contain gaming content. The more ads NAG runs the more pages NAG is.

Let me provide some perspective.

Edge, on average, has 130 pages. *Edge* has 30 or so full-page advertisements. NAG, on average, consists of 160 pages. NAG has 40 or so full-page advertisements. For further reference, let's look at two big American magazines: *GamePro* and *PC Gamer*. *GamePro*, on average, has 96 pages. *GamePro* has 35 or so full-page advertisements. On average, *PC Gamer* has 136 pages. *PC Gamer* has 75 or so full-page advertisements.

Therefore, in terms of how much page real estate goes to advertising: *Edge* = 23%; NAG = 25%; *GamePro* = 36%; *PC Gamer* = 55%.

A small, dedicated local team produces NAG. Every single word in the magazine is written here in South Africa. Care, effort and imperfect attention goes into producing such a large magazine every month. No advertiser holds sway over the scores or opinions in the magazine. The writers care about their work and are paid for their efforts.

There may come a time when NAG can no longer compete with the deluge of free opinions online. So be it. Until then, NAG will continue to be, in this writer's humble opinion, one of the finest gaming magazines in the world. South Africans should be proud of it. **NAG**



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HAMMIT!

WONDERING WHAT'S NEXT

RIGHT NOW, THE HOTTEST thing on the market (in my honest and not so humble opinion) definitely has to be the Nintendo Wii. Pricing aside, it still stands out in the small crowd of consoles claiming to be 'Next Generation' as rather unique and quirky while the others merely offer a graphics upgrade. However, before the death threats from the Xbox 360 and PS3 fanboys (and girls) start piling up in the editor's inbox, giving him more than just a nervous tick and an evil eye, let me get to the point.

The idea behind the Wii never surprised me. However, it raises certain questions: Why in the world did it take this long for it to come about?; and, more importantly, "How long before the next truly innovative move in the console market takes place?" In fact, what is the next move? In what direction are we headed?

In my opinion, porting handheld console games to cellphones is a relatively slow process compared to the speed that everything else seems to happen at in this modern age. It's a logical progression considering that the average cellphone sold now is practically a portable computer. The speed at which the number of users of MXit increases daily is a testament to the fact that people want this type of technology on their phones because they actually use it. And use it a lot.

Moreover, while I have yet to be enamoured by any cellphone game on offer, or by the concept itself, I think it deserves some attention – attention it's not yet getting from the companies that are definitely going to benefit the most from this emerging market.

Sure, all four of our cellular service providers (a title I'm sure was picked specifically for its irony) make millions of rands a minute per cellular tower. I believe whole-heartedly in the power of greed. Surely, if a company has the opportunity to make more money, more profit than it is already making, then there is no reason to continue in the current vein. It would go against all good business sense to do so.

So, when are we going to see their marketing campaigns aimed at the gamer? A cellphone loaded with a few games or a contract that rewards you for buying games through the provider you are tied to would probably work. Consumers seem to love gimmicks. So why not use a gaming one? The gaming market in this country might be small, but the number of gamers without cellphones is minimal. And with hardly any effort, the cellular service providers could be raking in even more dough than they already are.

This move would surely also bring about a surge in the number of games available for cellphones and possibly increase the quality of these games.

However, I don't see it happening for a good few years to come. As much as I would like to see this kind of positive change in one sector of the industry, I have also learnt to wait patiently (or impatiently, depending on the weather) for these changes – just as we have all learnt to bear the burden of more delays after months of hype and anticipation.

In the meantime, I guess we should appreciate what we already have and what is on the horizon this year: a whole year of NAG issues to get your grubby paws on, not to mention the games that will be released.

Which reminds me, in honour of this being the supposed month of love, give your gaming rig/console a little loving and buy it something special. If your significant other is also a gamer, thank your lucky stars and get a multiplayer game that you can enjoy together. If they're not, use this opportunity to slowly introduce them to your world. Maybe start small. Maybe start with a cellphone game... **NAG**



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RAMJET

by Walt Pretorius

RAMPAGE

SOME OF YOU MAY recall that I bemoaned the fact that I had to return a review HDTV a while ago. Whether you recall or not, I did, and it was a tough thing to go through... the transition from crappy TV to HD awesomeness was easy, but going back from awesomeness to crappy is a very hard pill to swallow. Whatever. Either you remember that piece of journalistic gold, or you don't.

Thing is, the lack of visual splendour drove me to splurge on a very nice new HDTV, something that is a rather difficult feat when you earn a journo's salary. I got one, though, and I planned to spend the slowed-paced holiday period that marked the end of 2007 with some super-good gaming. This activity, which I did undertake, lead to a number of problems. First off, hats off to Eskom once again for their generosity in dealing out power shedding. Do they have any idea how frustrating it is having to play long sections of games again because the developers decided to make use of checkpoints and save spots despite the hard drives built into next-gen consoles. I swear it's a conspiracy to drive me mad. However, that's not really what this column's about.

The next observation I managed to make during the few times that electricity was actually reaching the TV, was the fact that games have become super short. It's all about multiplayer now, but regular readers will remember that I have complained about that recently too. It's funny, but I always seem to see the negative side of things. Maybe I should not complain about something for a change.

Okay, so change of direction. Change of attitude. Here we go.

I would like to thank the gaming industry. I really would, and this thank you goes out to the entire industry. I would like to thank them for providing me with so much free time over the holiday season. See, notwithstanding the power cuts and my new (obviously evil and corrupting) HDTV, I wasn't drawn to the obvious time wasting that is playing games, all thanks to the very industry that develops and markets them. Why? Because there were no friggin' games. Wait, this flower-smelling, tree-hugging, shiny-happy-people hippy crap isn't working for me. Switch back to normal mode...

I hate this time of year. Everyone is fresh and bright and breezy because they've had a nice break. However, the one thing I want to do – play some new games over the decidedly cheesy and annoying family-orientated holiday period – didn't happen because there were no new games out there. Let's be honest: you can only replay a game so many times before even the glory of HD wears

off. And no, I flatly refuse to play multiplayer games. People who play single-player games during the silly season are grumpy and prefer to be alone. People who go online for multiplayer gaming are just pathetic.

Maybe the gaming industry should rethink their overall yearly marketing strategies. The lull around the end of the year, along with the lull during the middle of the year, are just two lulls too many. Perhaps some high-and-mighty moron with a degree in nothing useful or practical in the real world has figured out that there are times that gamers will rather not play new games. He's wrong. Perhaps the same guy thinks that there are times that gamers cannot afford new games... wrong again (gamers will sell their mothers on street corners in Hillbrow to get new games if they have to).

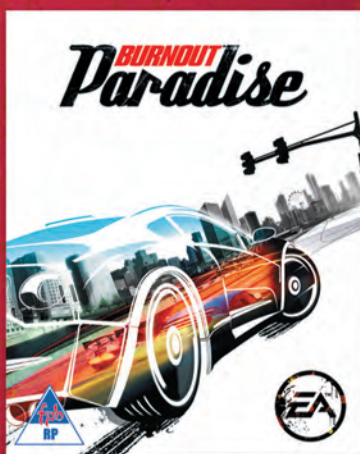
So, instead of spreading the games out through the year, ensuring a steady stream of good titles (which would probably increase sales), the morons clump all the big releases together. The end result is an inundation of great titles at specific times of the year, none of which get the time they deserve, as gamers (if they're at all like me) rabidly hop from one game to the next. So, gamers should control themselves and play only one game at a time? Ain't gonna happen, buddy! Gamers are obsessive and they'll always try beating their friends in getting through a game first. (Good thing the games are getting shorter.)

Oh, why do I bother? No one is going to listen to me, because I'm the last sane person left on the planet. I'm going to stop writing now. I'm going to sit on the couch and stare at my TV. There's nothing on it. Between Eskom and the gaming industry, I don't have to turn it on until April. I probably won't be able to either. **NAG**





The Love of Gaming

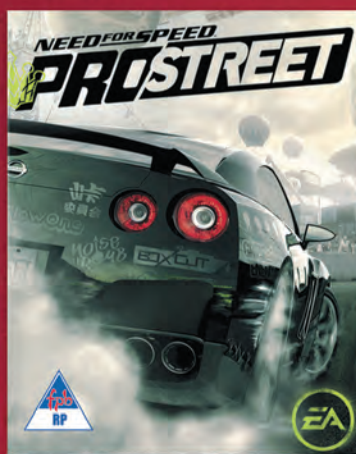


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KINGPIN

by Michael James

A LOAD OF POSITIVE ELECTRICITY IN A SHED...

PEOPLE WHO KNOW ME well know two things about me: I bitch* a lot and I'm somewhat demanding. I see the bitching as an external release mechanism so I don't internalise all my negative emotions and eventually end up in a Wimpy one day, stunned at how a shotgun can make so much blood come out of the morning rush-hour crowd. I see 'demanding' as my God-given right on this planet: if I have to be here, I'm not taking it lying down.

So, knowing all of this, you might expect me to have a lot of bad things to say about Eskom and their load shedding. Normally you'd be right, but I've decided that five years, or however long this problem is going to be with us, are just far too long to keep getting and staying uptight. Anytime I'm out and about and the power goes off, someone nearby spits out something nasty about our government or Eskom. They march around shopping centres, restaurants and their houses cursing everything from the copper wires that carry the electricity to anyone and anything involved with supplying it. Their faces are red, their eyes are wild, and if you look closely, you'll see a few tiny veins throbbing just under the skin. I do understand their pain: I've recently spent a few mornings chasing electricity around the area where I live. First it went out at breakfast, then during a movie I was watching. I've been up late at night writing an article because the power went off before I was done. The list is long and I know I'm not alone. However, for me things are different now. I'm enjoying the lack of power and the randomness of it all is... exciting. Despite the schedules nobody can decipher, one just never really knows when it's going to happen. It's put a different spin on work, because now I work harder when I have light - if I'm lazy and the power goes, I might end up working until dawn (it's the modern version of 'make hay while the sun shines'). It's put a different spin on being at home, because now when the power goes out, I can get stuck into something else besides the hundreds of different options the world of electronic entertainment distracts me with. It's also amazing to hear just how quiet the house is when everything is off: no beeping, buzzing, humming or clicking - it's so peaceful that it's downright disturbing. I'm now reading more, spending more time outside and I'm discovering new restaurants as I chase the power around my new extended neighbourhood. It's all virgin territory and quite remarkable. So, instead of lambasting Eskom, we should all be thanking them. Thanking them for a little peace and quiet, for allowing us to spend more time talking to each other, for getting a few hours extra sleep in and for forcing us to take a break from that computer or that game or that television series.

The other upside to this is perhaps even more important, and that's showing people the exact kind of problem we might face one day if we don't all start conserving energy. Turn down that air conditioner. Switch off that geyser. Why is there a light burning in an empty room? It's so easy to do but everyone waits for someone else to take the initiative.

From me, this will probably be the first and last save-the-planet-and-see-the-bright-side-of-things column for 2008. You see, it's still early in the year and I'm as fresh faced and eager as a firefighter recruit. This changes as the year moves along and by December, I'll be an article-churning cynic with a bitter and jaded streak who nobody wants to talk to. To wrap up: do yourself a favour and visit the Eskom Website (specifically, www.eskom.co.za/live/loadshed.php). Read about why they're load shedding: understanding something can sometimes remove the fear or hatred of it. Read all about what you and your household can do, and perhaps if we all do a little something, it'll go a long way. **NAG**

*I'm really sorry I have to use this kind of word in a nice family magazine, but I don't think the suggested replacement word, 'moan', works too well in portraying the kind of tough look I'm going for here.

Side note to Timmy's mom: NAG is a decent magazine that usually doesn't allow swearwords, but sometimes one simply must press the creative freedom button. Besides, I'm pretty sure little Timmy has heard and more than likely used much worse.



SOMEWHERE BETWEEN
SOLDIER AND HIT MAN,
RIGHT AND WRONG,
FRIEND AND SHIELD,
A SALARY AND A GOLD MINE

IS AN **ARMY OF TWO.**



PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360

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DEEPER UNDERGROUND

Tomb Raider 8: Underworld

DON'T WORRY. THERE IS NO NEED TO SAY "LARA'S BACK!" THE ANXIETY OF SEEING THE SERIES DIE AND THE EUPHORIA OF EXPERIENCING ITS REBIRTH HAS SINCE SWEEPED PAST. THIS IS WHERE THE GOING GETS TOUGH. CAN CRYSTAL DYNAMICS AVOID THE TOMB RAIDER CURSE AND CONTINUE TO TAKE THE SERIES HIGHER? WELL, IT'S CERTAINLY NOT PLANNING TO SWEEP FANS AWAY WITH JUST ANOTHER RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE...



Another Lara cover? More noise about *Tomb Raider*? It would be fair to accuse NAG of being obsessed (or at least very accommodating) with this series. Some pundits might say that we're just infatuated with a virtual girl that we'd never find in the real world. But those readers who have followed our various features and reviews on Lara's adventures know that we just adore the type of game this series is known for. In truth, we are not obsessed, just really big fans. In all honesty, we'd run just as many *GTA* covers if Rockstar wasn't such a prima Donna.

But *Tomb Raider* is not just important from a fan perspective. There are very few games that operate in this genre and until the recent arrival of Nathan Drake and *Uncharted*, Lara was arguably the only game character actively making us scale ancient tombs to find lost treasures. *Prince of Persia* follows the same tradition, but the two are only similar in a few aspects. The point is that we love *Tomb Raider* because no other game out there does it like this.

Of course, when talking about Lara, you

have to touch on the dark years - which are really the majority of the franchise's lifespan. As is common knowledge by now, *Tomb Raider* suffered several increasingly terrible games, forcing publisher Eidos to bring in Crystal Dynamics, another Eidos studio best known for the *Legacy of Kain* games. The good news is that the studio pulled Lara out of the bog, cleaned her up and sent her on probably her best adventures yet. The bad news is that we've not seen a *Kain* game since...

So far, Crystal has two *TR* games under its belt: *Legend* and *Anniversary*. Both were successful and enjoyed by fans. *Legend* introduced a cinematic quality that previous developer Core had problems getting right, while *Anniversary* showed that the studio understood the game's fundamentals. Even though it was a spiritual remake of the first game that many regarded as a cash-in attempt, *Anniversary* held its own. In reality, the two were developed by separate teams - *Tomb Raider 8* has been in development not long after *Legend* was released. Dubbed *Underworld*, it's clear that the latest adventure will be the one where Crystal cements its reputation with this series.



While *Underworld* makes liberal use of dynamic lights, the team felt that this made things like plants and architecture feel flat with hard edges. Thus, the engine employs a mix of dynamic lights and light-maps to get the right balance.



First, a bit of honesty. NAG never saw *Underworld* in action. We would have, but a visa glitch left the writer stuck at the airport. Thus, we missed the trip to Mexico, where Crystal and Eidos unveiled the new game. Still, the tickets were paid for, we had the nice cover and, c'mon, it's Lara. We covered this already. Also, usually one would be skeptical and very careful. But we've met the Crystal guys before when they first unveiled *Legend*. There is no doubt in this magazine's opinion that the guys in San Francisco have only just begun with the series and, bar any unbelievable screw-ups, *Underworld* is going to be awesome. No, we can't verify that, but suffice to say, we plan to buy it regardless. Call it an educated guess or a matter of faith, but *Underworld* will be great.

So what is *Underworld*? Lara is doing her usual thing, finding ancient treasures in surprisingly complicated and elaborate tombs and forgotten cities. She will globetrot to

various locations, including Mexico and South Asia. Photographers were dispatched to the various parts of the world and took not only thousands of pictures of local ruins, but of the local plants as well. This will be Lara's first proper next-gen adventure and while Crystal regarded *Legend* at the series' rebirth, *Underworld* represents a dynamic step forward, boasting a whole new world of detail. As is often the case with a series, several things invented for the previous games didn't make it into the final product (or were simply not possible). Thus, *Underworld* becomes the lucky recipient. Visually it will be a huge leap forward. In *Anniversary*, Lara got dirty or wet as she engaged nature's elements, but in *Underworld* this will be a lot more targeted. Specific parts of her body, such as a knee, can become dirty and only parts that come into contact with water would be cleaned (and become wet). A new (and presumably dynamic) weather system pushes things even further as rain will cascade off Lara and the

surrounding environment. On top of it all, Lara will be able to sweat, showing the exertion of her tomb-hopping. The rain is for more than just a pretty factor: water will make ledges wet, upping the chances that Lara could slip or lose her grip.

Dynamism seems to be a theme for this game. In the past, players would follow well-worn paths to puzzle set-pieces, which they had to solve to continue. In *Underworld*, the linearity gives way to exploration: to solve a civilisation's ancient trap, Lara will need to find its various parts and figure out how they work together (or for each other). There seems to be a lot of climbing and clambering in the game, boosted by a new animation system that blends motion-capture (a first for the series) with traditional hand animation. Does this mean that Lara will be as nimble as the guy in *Assassin's Creed*? Probably not. 'Go where you want' climbing isn't exactly the *Tomb Raider* formula, but it will be well beyond anything fans are used to.

A girl always needs some foundation. Lara's skin comprises of more than a dozen layers. These determine the skin tone and texture, how light scatters, shadows, sweat and dirt, etc.



SLIPPERY SLOPE

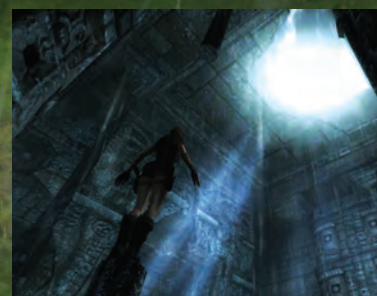
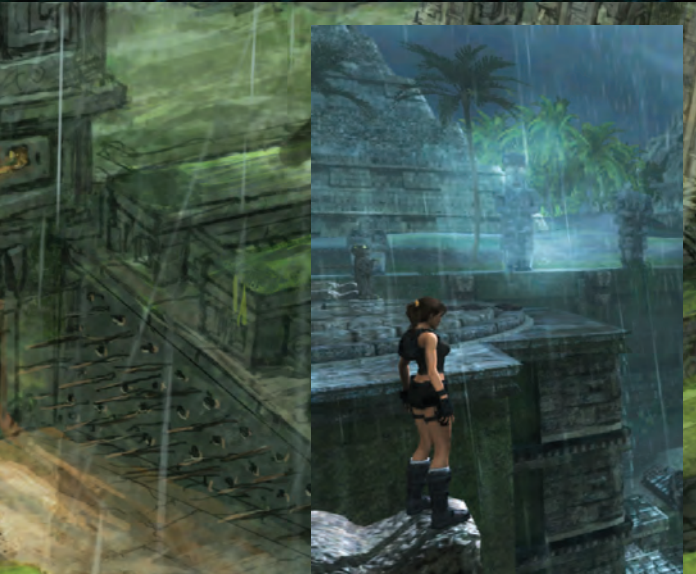
This could cause a lot more screams of anguish and disbelief - something *Tomb Raider* fans are already pretty familiar with. In the game a weather system will keep changing the environment for Lara. The best example of this is rain that will make ledges slippery and hard to hold onto.





FIND YOUR WAY

In *Underworld* it will not be a simple matter of following the well-worn route and discovering a set of ancient doors that need to be opened via a somewhat redundant puzzle. Now the tombs are elaborate and the mechanisms that grant access to them even more so. Lara will have to explore a level to discover the various aspects of a tomb and the puzzles could become quite large and inventive. To help her with this, Lara has access to vehicles such as her bike (and others, yet to be announced). Crystal Dynamics hasn't elaborated on this aspect of the game yet, but it sounds like a big step forward from the stoic business of going deeper into the tunnel because there is nowhere else to go.



Even though *Underworld* is a direct sequel to *Legend*, the combat is taking a step back for more exploration. There will be enemies that require vanquishing - hence Lara's new hand-to-hand combat abilities - but they will be fairly rare. Above ground you can expect the usual wildlife keen on eating the British lass, while underground new and mythological creatures guard their lairs with a vengeance. Since the plot is still a secret, it's not clear what kind of human adversaries and characters can be expected, but time will

inevitably reveal that.

So, yes, we never saw this game in action. We are absolutely smitten by the series and whatever calibre of objective non-bias you'd expect you will not get from us. Just for the record, we're pretty chummy with the publisher too. But despite all of that, we're confident that no fingers will be burned here. You might not be completely happy with what Crystal has produced for the series so far, but you can admit that they are far from f***ing it up. Have a little faith - soon you're going to enjoy a whole lot of Lara. **NAG**

DRY PATCH

IT'S OFFICIAL: WE'RE IN the sucky time of the game calendar. Despite the torrent of releases over the past three months, we all have nothing left to play and everyone is aching for something new to entertain them. A few of us even stoop as low as to pop in that licenced game someone gave us as a gift. But

it's just not the same. In the meantime, we have to start hearing about all the awesome games that are yet to come. Perhaps it's smarter to take a break from games for the next month or so and take up a less seasonal activity like knitting or bowling...

STREET FIGHTER IV

Developer→ Capcom | Publisher→ Capcom | Platforms→ 360, PS3 | Genre→ Action | Release→ 2008

LOOK, WE MIGHT GET paid to do this job, but we're not going to take a walk through the long, elaborate history that is the *Street Fighter* series. Ironically no one seems to remember the first game and everything feels like it began with *SF2*. Since then, there have been numerous sequels, super versions, Alpha versions and even a stab or two at turning the 2D fighter into a more-dimensional experience. Yet, *SF2* remains a bit like *Counter-Strike*: fans support the old version (or at least some of the very faithful updates to it) and everything else around the series has not quite made the same impact. For example, has anyone here actually played *SF3*? Then there was the movie...

Well, Capcom feels it's time that we get a new, crisp game and *SFIV* looks set to be that. If anything it looks very good. But will the game keep the old-school crowd happy? Or will it attract new fans? That's hard to say: fighting games are usually hit or miss depending on the audience you're aiming for. Hopefully this won't be a simple attempt to extend the life of the series, but instead a new lease of life for one of the biggest fighting games ever made.



DEMIGOD

Developer→ Gas Powered Games | Publisher→ TBA
Platforms→ TBA Genre→ Action, Strategy | Release→ 2008

CHRIS TAYLOR APPARENTLY SPENT a bit of time watching his kids (or someone) playing the insanely popular *WarCraft III* mod, *Defense of the Ancients*. Instead of building bases and units, in *DotA* players assume the roles of hero characters who have to bust up the opposing team of hero characters' base. To be able to do so, all the heroes go around the map and kill enemy units to gain experience and thus become more powerful. *Demigod* follows the same formula, but because it will be from the team that brought us *Dungeon Siege* and *Supreme Commander*, it should be quite a bit more special than any mod. One of several demigod characters can be chosen and controlled in a battle where they ultimately pummel other demigods. The characters will have different abilities and some will be able to build units and structures as part of their abilities. *DotA* + the *Supreme Commander* guys? Sounds like a sweet deal to us.



LEGO BATMAN

Developer→ Traveller's Tales | Publisher→ Warner Bros
Platforms→ DS, PC, PS2, PS3, PSP, Wii, X360
Genre→ Action | Release→ Q3 2008

BACK FROM ITS BUYING spree where it picked up developer Traveller's Tales, Warner Bros. must clearly be keen on *LEGO Batman*. That's obvious, given the huge success that the *LEGO Star Wars* games turned out to be. Now the plastic bricks will represent the dark and dangerous Gotham City, in which Batman and his mouthy sidekick Robin will demonstrate the best kind of vigilante justice. It gets better: the game won't be based on the upcoming movie, but an independent treatment of the Batman universe. Expect the Dark Knight's top enemies and allies to come crawling out of the alleys. Brace yourself for a tongue-in-cheek script. Anticipate lots of LEGO pieces being thrown around for whatever reason. Above all, let's not forget the great co-op mode that everyone loved in the *Star Wars* game. What else is there left to say? "Holy Plastic Blocks, Batman!" Yup, that should do it.

TOP SPIN 3

Developer→ PAM | Publisher→ 2K Sports | Platforms→ 360, PS3 | Genre→ Sport | Release→ Q2 2008

TOP SPIN ORIGINALLY CAME from the ill-fated XSN Sports label from Microsoft. The label has since faded into obscurity, but the game series lived on, later to be picked up by 2K Sports. Tennis games are certainly not a dime a dozen yet and even though the antics of *Wii Sports* kept many people happy, real fans want a bit more bang for their buck when it comes to the sport. Also, as far as we can remember, EA hasn't produce a tennis game, so it's a smart place for 2K Sports to gain a bit of ground. No sporting stars have been associated with it yet, but you can expect everything else to be a big step up. *Top Spin 2* already introduced the series to the new generation of consoles and drew the line as far as sharp visuals go. If the third game just pushes that envelope a bit more, it might well become the must-have tennis game this side of the next-generation machines.



WHAT WE WANT



DUKE NUKEM MANHATTAN PROJECT 2

Even if it's just a sexied-up port of the 2002 original for the PSP or XBLA, we want more 2.5D side-scrolling Duke. A criminally underrated title in the *Duke Nukem* series, *Manhattan Project* saw the blond beefcake duking it out with Mech Morphix, whose science fair entry – a volatile substance called Gluon Liquid Omega-Phased Plasma or G.L.O.P.P. – is transforming everything into blood-hungry mutants.

DINK SMALLWOOD MMO

Punch ducks and stomp on snakes and burn down trees and loot chestnuts and grind your way to becoming an awesomely unremarkable level-60 pig farmer. Find love among the wart-nosed country lasses, and buy yourself a ramshackle bungalow in the local swamp. For a reasonable monthly subscription fee, we'd hit that.

THE NEW INDY MOVIE

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull. It's been languishing in development hell for years while the script was tweaked, retooled, changed and then tweaked again. It's probably more hyped than *The Phantom Menace* was, which will undoubtedly lead to some disappointment here and there. But seriously, who really cares what the critics say: you know it's going to be cool. Harrison Ford and his Fedora plus some bull-whip action mixed with a little Indiana Jones theme music, stirred up by Steven Spielberg, equal zillions of box-office dollars and Indy lunch tins.

THE NEW SPEED RACER MOVIE

The Watchowskis have earned a certain amount of credibility with the *Matrix* Trilogy and *V for Vendetta*, so we'll bite. Even though *Speed Racer* is one of the campest, strangest little cartoons to have ever come out of the East, the trailer makes it very clear that the Watchowskis are dead serious about making our eyeballs explode. The colours! Go "Peyote Racer", go!

ANOTHER HOLIDAY

The one thing we didn't get in our stockings this Christmas... But fear not, fearless citizens of NAG-topia... for your tireless leaders never slumber! There's just too much to do! Why, could you imagine what would happen if *NAG* ceased to review, preview and feature the hottest (and sometimes really crappiest) games of our lifetime? It would be a catastrophe! Someone might get hurt!

WII CHESS

Developer→ Nintendo | Publisher→ Nintendo | Platforms→ Wii | Genre→ Sport | Release→ February 2008

IT'S FUNNY – CONSIDERING how widely known the chess system is around the world, you'd think more digital versions of the game would be around. But maybe the problem lies with making a game that is a good chess player. *Wii Chess* does exactly what it says on the box: you play chess. The game will use a version of the Loop Chess Engine, which was ranked third in the world last year. It will also feature ten difficulty levels and plenty of replay options, plus (obviously) two-player support. What seems a bit strange is that all of the screens show a rather generic-looking set. Hopefully, as this is a Nintendo game, there will be some Ninty-themed sets to play. In fact, it would be barren without – even the latest *Chessmaster* has an adorable Rabbids set to play with.



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SPECS

■ SIZE

46" (117cm)

■ RESOLUTION

Full HD 1080p (1,920 x 1,080)

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15,000:1 (dynamic)

■ RESPONSE TIME

8ms

■ VIEWING ANGLE (H/V)

178/178

■ POSTPROCESSOR

DNLe

■ INPUTS

HDMI x 3, Composite x 2,

Component x 2, S-video, VGA

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PROTOTYPE

MANHATTAN, 2008. A VIRULENT epidemic has overwhelmed the city, its wretched victims turned gnarled and twisted monstrosities imbued with preternatural strength and uncompromising rage. The military has rolled in the tanks and declared a quarantine zone – but that’s because they were probably responsible for the plague anyway. Predictably enough, the marines and the mutants don’t get along terribly well, and soon enough they’re pitching squabbles in the middle of intersections and generally making life difficult for anyone trying to hail a cab or buy a hotdog or do whatever else people do in New York. Meanwhile, a mysterious faction known as the Black Watch has begun to cast long shadows across the city, its operatives pledged to some dread purpose that mostly involves killing everyone in an effort to eradicate all trace of the disease.

Into the midst of this incipient apocalypse stumbles Alex Mercer. He has no memory of his life before waking up on a laboratory

table somewhere in the dankest recesses of the city. Apparently the erstwhile subject of some highly unethical medical experimentation, Alex now finds himself playing host to an array of interesting new biological features that you won’t find anywhere else on matchmaker.com. These include the ability to turn his arms into massive spikes or sprout chitinous body armour, and a cannibalistic streak. Well, the developers euphemistically call it “consuming DNA”, but it’s really just eating people to absorb and commandeer their memories, knowledge, and skills. Once he’s gobbled up his tasty Chicken Substitute™, he’ll even be able to assume his lunch’s former appearance. Think *Mystique* meets Hannibal Lecter, with a hoodie. And what’s a little man-snacking between consenting (or momentarily startled) adults when you get all that rad stuff in return? Strap on your bibs, and let’s get special. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Most of *Prototype*’s main storyline is concerned with Alex’s recovery of his elusive past, the doubtless ghastly truth of his real identity, outrageous revenge, and some sort of elaborate denouement that does not preclude one or two future sequels. Radical calls this portion of the game the “Web of Intrigue” – a collection of some 250 “nodes”, including cinematics, dialogue, action sequences, and allusions to some sort of wicked government conspiracy. Many of these memory fragments are connected with a number of important people scattered throughout the city, and presumably liberated in Alex’s usual grisly style. The more nodes you acquire, the clearer the narrative becomes. So yes, something more or less exactly like *Assassin’s Creed*, but with more biomass and tentacles.



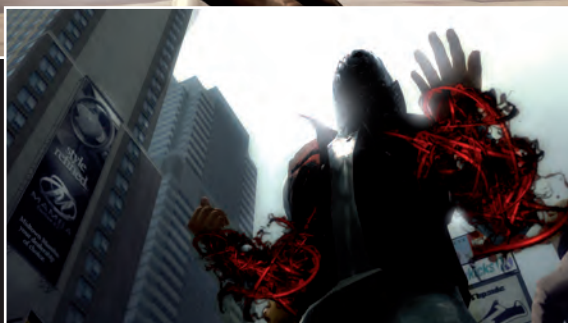
The government finally cracks down on jaywalkers

PEOPLE TO KILL

When he isn't nibbling limbs in darkened alleyways, Alex will be spending most of his time brawling with the locals. These include the aforementioned marines, muties, and Black Watch special ops forces.

The marines are making a total shambles of their disaster management programme, and can barely maintain their ration cards and ammo piles in the constant scrapping with the muties. The muties are really just overgrown bad-tempered hellhounds, although their feats of strength and speed do bear an uncomfortable resemblance to Alex's own. Different batches of the same contagion? You read it here first.

The Black Watch are an altogether different breed of nasty. While the marines and muties will cheerfully lob grenades and fangs at each other all day without pausing to consider alternative approaches, the Black Watch are constantly evolving and adapting their arsenal alongside this emergent menace. If Alex discovers some new method of making blood squirt, he can be certain the Black Watch will unveil some new technology to counter this threat. They're also brandishing a few canisters of stuff that will inhibit Alex's more remarkable features, because they're such rotten spoilsports.



STUFF TO DO

From the very beginning of the game, the city of New York is wide open for free-roaming exploration, with no artificial off-limits zoning, and sandbox-style play. One of the key features of *Prototype* is a multi-optional "deceive or destroy" approach to conflict and resolving objectives, which is where Alex's monster abilities really come into play.

In a promotional demo touted around the game's conventions last year, onlookers gawped as Alex variously laid waste to a military installation by bare-handed assault, consuming and assuming the guise of an unlucky military officer and calling in an airstrike over the target location, borrowing one of the base's tanks and blasting the place to itty-bitties, and – most devious, indeed – luring in the muties and lollygagging around the corner while the gullible pups did all the hard work for him.

In addition to his butch new physique and digestive tract, Alex is also now quite the parkour enthusiast. Parkour? That's the art of moving oneself from A to B with nimble efficiency and enviable style. Something like, er, Altair in *Assassin's Creed*. They're even wearing the same hoodie. Anyway, Alex can scale sheer vertical surfaces, leapfrog obstacles, and fling himself around with merry abandon like a kitty cat. So can Altair, but Alex also eats people, remember?

Finally, as every preschooler knows, two superpowered abominations are better than one – so Radical is including two-player co-op online play, with number two taking the role of Alex's clone. "We don't have any of the conceptual problems of having two Alexes," says lead designer Dennis Detwiler. "He is, after all, a shape-shifter who has absolute control of his genetic structure. All he needs to do is grow a duplicate." Abstergo Industries wishes they could do that.





A lesser man would need goggles



THE CLUB

THE FIRST RULE OF *The Club* is that you do not talk about *The Club*. The second rule of *The Club* is: you DO NOT talk about *The Club*. No, wait. The second rule of *The Club* is that if you don't have a 10x kill combo multiplier, at least eight Skullshots, and a greasy clump of nitroglycerine strapped to your chest, you suck at *The Club*.

"*The Club* isn't about hiding behind cover and waiting for guys to come to you," says Nick Davis, design manager at Bizarre Creations HQ. "It's not about stealth. It's sort of the anti-*Gears of War*." Or rather, it's an arcade style third-person shooter hurtling lickety-split somewhere between *The Running Man*, *Fight Club*, *Smash TV*, *Unreal Tournament*, and *Chilli Con Carnage*.

There's this top-secret club, its members dropping double-barrelled names through the moneyed ranks of billionaire software moguls, crimelords, Hollywood superstars, Third World dictators, and even royalty. Having grown bored with slurping 1787 Chateau Lafite* out of dead porn stars' eye sockets (or whatever), these people have resorted to sponsoring combatants in a

reckless underground blood sport for their continued amusement.

Okay, so your job is to rearrange your opponents' squishy pink bits to a critical point where sustaining life is no longer a viable option. This is standard shooter stuff. Where *The Club* deviates from this well-subscribed gameplan, however, is in the execution (pun shamelessly intended). As each mission begins, you're deployed onto a stage that resembles nothing more than a tarted-up *Laser Quest* arena. The idea is to blaze your way to the exit, rubbing out goons as speedily and abundantly as possible, in order to meet a target score. If you can stack 'em up quickly enough, you'll tick up a score multiplier, while bonus points are awarded for skillful frags (headshots, or knocking the stuffing out of a sneaky sniper lurking across the courtyard with a well-aimed pot shot, for example), smart manoeuvring (combat rolling into a shotgun spatterfest), and even nailing someone with the last round in your gun.

True to its arcade stylings, the game plays on rails. There's really only ever one way to go: enemies tend to behave with



some small measure of predictability, health and ammo pickups are plentiful, and you'll take a brutal thrashing before falling down dead. Reaching the exit isn't actually terribly hard, but hitting your target score can be. You're likely to find yourself replaying levels over again, plotting the best line in order to maintain a constant multiplier throughout and pull a gargantuan score. It's a bit like *Project Gotham Racing*, but without all those pesky cars.

The unorthodox mingling of genres notwithstanding, *The Club* plays like the classic cabinet brawler at the local café that you loved as a kid – frenetic, relentless, addictive, full of big explosions, and eminently replayable. And with buckets of multiplayer guns 'n' guts goodness, including four-way split-screen and eight-way hotseat play, *The Club* might soon be hijacking a *Halo 3* game near you.

NAG

Tarryn "Faster, Better, Stronger" van der Byl

* 1787 Chateau Lafite. The world's most expensive wine. NAG educates!



Yeah, that tooth is definitely going to have to come out.

TUROK

YOU'RE IN THE JUNGLE. You are surrounded by carnivorous dinosaurs. You have dual-wielding automatic shotguns. Can things get any better? Yup, *Turok* is back and ready to do more of all that dinosaur hunting he's famous for. Actually he's not hunting them. He and a mercenary group called the Wolf Pack are on a remote planet to capture some major bad guy. The planet just happens to be full of all kinds of terrible lizards, making life more interesting for all parties involved. The bad news: raptors are really fast and unpredictable. The good news: they don't really care who they attack.

But let's take a step back. This will be *Turok*'s sixth venture on a major console, having done its rounds on the PC and N64 quite a few years ago. It used to be the shooter and if it weren't for a downward spiral of releases from an increasingly desperate Acclaim, *Turok* would still be regarded as highly as *Goldeneye* is (yes, it is a fundamentally simpler shooter, but complexity and amazement don't always need to go hand-in-hand). In one way, the news of another *Turok* game must have been met with a few groans. But then again, there are not nearly enough games with dinosaurs in them.

Back to now: a demo was recently released on Xbox LIVE, providing a first

glimpse to see if the new game will be up to scratch. That the developer licensed Unreal Engine 3 is a good sign, though the demo code doesn't quite show this off yet. Presumably, the demo's size was trimmed by keeping textures small, so it's not a drop-dead gorgeous example and, to be honest, a far cry from the screenshots shown so far. But, as mentioned, that might be the matter of aiming for a small download size. You can certainly see UE3 powering things under the hood and visually *Turok* feels like a mix between *Gears of War* and *Halo 3*.

Fortunately, the gameplay isn't scaled back for a demo. *Turok* will be a pretty straightforward first-person shooter. You can dual-wield most weapons, but you won't be able to carry more than two at a time, excluding your knife and bow. *Turok* can 'sneak' around and silently take out enemies. That is if they don't see you and they usually do. It's not real stealth, though the knife kills will be useful to take out some lone sentries or guards without alerting nearby forces. Certain weapons can also fire a flare, which attract dinosaurs - launch one into an enemy and watch him (or it) be swarmed with scaled claws and teeth. Combat is more arcade than accurate, perfect for a console controller, though the impact of *Turok*'s weapons (including the knife) needs



a little more oomph. But the sound is really nice - you are able to track nearby soldiers by listening to their footsteps. Tactics will likely play very little of a role and you have no control over any team-mates who might be fighting with you. With the exception of a very spartan HUD, *Turok* feels like a good old FPS experience. There is one new touch: the game lifted *Chronicle of Riddick*'s third-person views when you climb up ridges and such. Any development team that uses *COR* as a guide is alright by us.

The level design feels pretty solid, if highly linear. Every now and then you lose your bearings, usually because a raptor just smacked you off a ledge. But you easily find the right track again (and when you don't, the game brings up a pointer to direct you). The jungle areas appear quite lush and, apart from the type that wants to eat you, there are dinosaurs calmly roaming all over the place. They give the world a certain level of life - a nice touch since the enemy AI's life-likeness seem limited to running away while firing.

Overall, judging from the demo, *Turok* is going to be fairly good looking, pretty solid and a fun shooter. Don't expect a lot in terms of innovation, but it doesn't look like anyone dropped the ball. **NAG**

James Francis

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB



TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY

IN 1931, WHILE IN New York, Winston Churchill was hit by a taxi. He survived the accident but walked with a cane for the rest of his life. *Fall of Liberty* changes reality by twisting this historical fact: Churchill dies in the accident! Without his strong personality leading a country at war, the outcome of WWII is changed dramatically: the Normandy invasion never happens and the UK and all of Europe fall under Nazi rule by 1945.

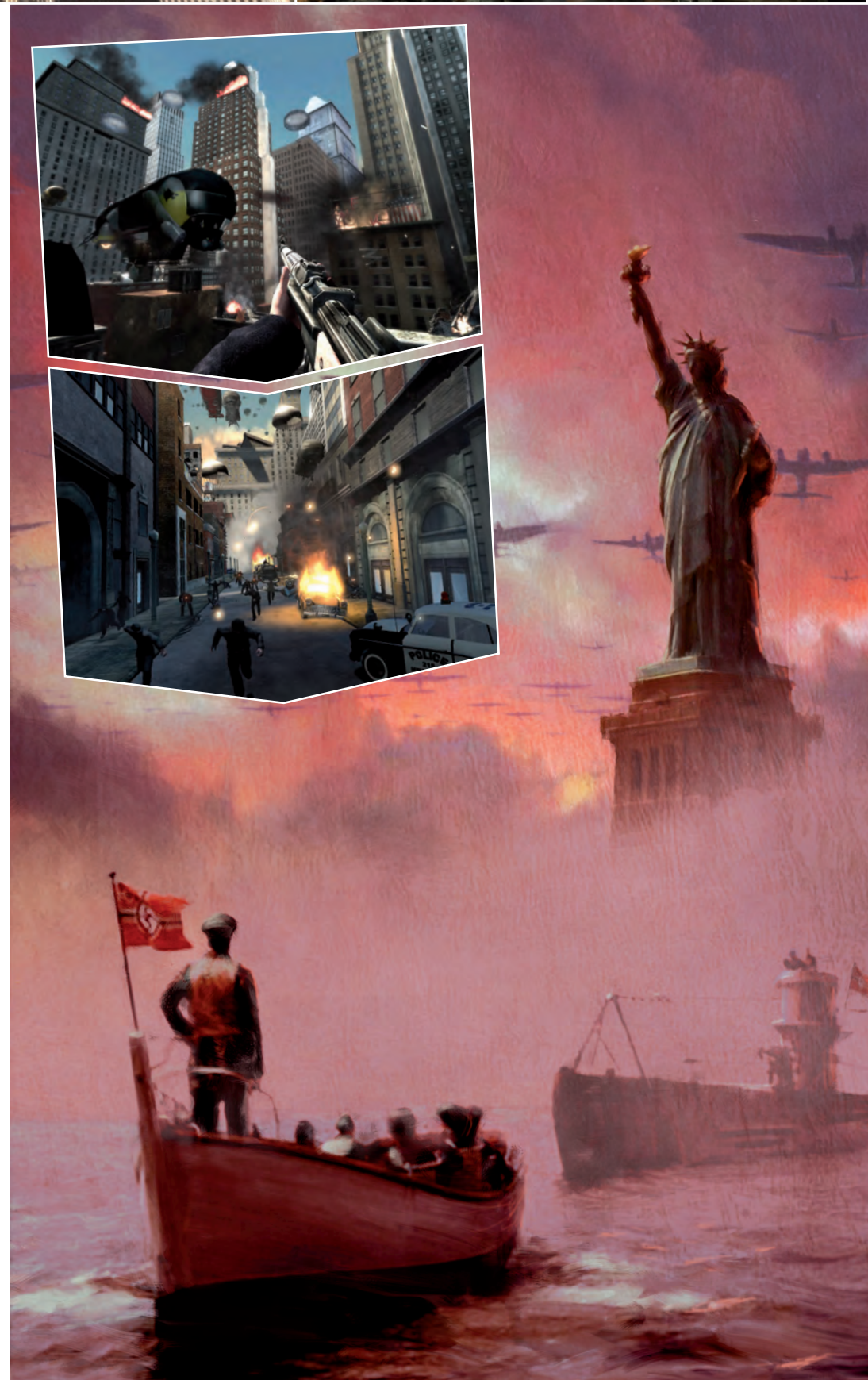
On 7 December 1951, the Reich, using its crushing technical superiority, launches an all-out surprise attack on America – beginning with a mass invasion of New York – and eventually defeats the US. You are Dan Carson, a construction worker minding his own business in Nazi-occupied US as the game starts.

So far, not much has been released about the game's plot, but it seems that *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* will focus more on the fact that Dan is just an ordinary civilian with no weapons training at all. Players, as resistance fighters, will be forced to use ammunition sparingly and strategically with the occasional grenade thrown in for good measure. This will certainly be interesting for a WWII era type game. There will also be a more involved hand-to-hand fighting system implemented in the game.

From what we have seen so far of *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty*, the graphics seems to be astounding right from the outset. In the opening sequences of the game, the player will experience New York under attack from Carson's vantage point at the top of a half-finished skyscraper. Standing there overlooking the besieged city, the sky is filled with zeppelins, blimps, falling debris, and smoke rising from damaged and ruined buildings. Players will also notice people falling out of these buildings to their deaths in the streets below, which are just as busy as the skies. Of course, this will hardly be noticed due to the extreme amount of action that they player will be faced with from the very outset of the game.

Everything seen so far proves that when *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* is released for the PS3, Xbox 360, and PC, it will be a massive hit. For everyone who loves WWII shooters, *Fall of Liberty* will be the must-have WWII FPS of 2008. We have experienced D-Day many times over in games such as *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty*. Now get ready to skip D-Day all together, turn resistance fighter in the streets of New York in the 1950s, and kick some Nazi ass. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



DEAD SPACE

Developer → EA Redwood Shores | Publisher → Electronic Arts | Genre → Survival Horror | Release → Q4 2008

ACCORDING TO GAMEREVOLVER.COM, WHEN Schiefel and Robbins presented the idea for *Dead Space* to EA, they expected nothing more than a shrug. What they got, instead, was six months to create a working demo and the opportunity to handpick their team. The product of their toils was obviously worth the effort as it has also been "tagged for a possible trilogy with branch offs of other media like TV and comic books."

So, what's the game about? *Dead Space* is a sci-fi survival horror that has you up against an alien race, known as Necromorphs, which have infected the crew of the space ship you were assigned to repair. What at first seemed like a routine mission for engineer Isaac

Clarke has become, unsurprisingly, a lonely fight for survival.

A few things make this particular title stand out among the hordes in this genre. Firstly, your character is no hero. Art director Ian Milham put it eloquently when he said, "He's not Master Chief." Isaac Clarke has no combat training and must simply make use of his equipment like the plasma cutter or Stasis gun, and anything he finds around the space ship to keep himself alive. Moreover, because he didn't come loaded with weapons, he will run out of ammo at exactly the wrong time.

Another important aspect of the game is the fact that a headshot is not always the best way to get rid of the enemies you come

up against. In fact, it may even make the situation a whole lot worse. Ultimately, your survival in the game depends on your ability to figure out the weak spots of the different enemies you encounter.

It was also very important for the developers that the game's scares didn't become predictable after a few hours of play. The team spent a great deal of time watching horror movies to study the best techniques (including music timing and inducing psychological fear) to ensure a variety of different frights.

There is no word yet whether *Dead Space* will feature multiplayer or not. **NAG**

Megan Hughes

Mind the gap



PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB

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OUT WITH THE

OLD,

IN WITH THE



NEW

IT'S A NEW YEAR AND ABOUT DAMN TIME. NAG HAS SPARED NO EXPENSE TO BRING YOU THIS COMPREHENSIVE AND VERY IMPORTANT LIST OF GAMES THAT WERE HOT, GAMES THAT WERE NOT, AND GAMES THAT WILL ROCK CIVILISATION IN 2008. HANG ON TIGHT, IT'S GONNA BE A BUMPY RIDE!



AULD LANG SYNE! ACCORDING to Google, it means "Times gone by" and it's something people are supposed to say with the advent of a new year. Here at NAG, we look back fondly on the year of two thousand and seven and all the gaming joy it brought us. So let us take a moment to honour the games of the year past, before boldly forgetting they even existed and focusing only on what neat stuff will be hitting our stores in 2008. There is no doubt that 2007 may well have been one of the best years in gaming since 2006, but 2008 is so much newer! And if there is one thing you can say about gamers (aside from many, many things), it's that gamers are always looking for the new, the fresh and the interesting, which is so much better than the old, the stale and the boring.

THE BEST OF 2007



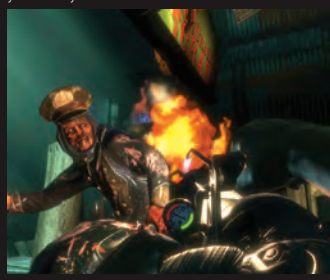
AFTER YEARS OF PAINSTAKING RESEARCH AND MANY FALLEN COMRADES ALONG THE WAY, WE BRING YOU OUR PERSONAL NAG LIST OF WHAT WAS WORTH PLAYING IN 2007.



BIOSHOCK

[PC/360]

Some complained that *BioShock* was just *System Shock 1.5*, or that it wasn't as open-ended as it could have been, or that the blue-green palette of the underwater dystopia of Rapture didn't match the drapes. Those people were summarily drowned in a tragic plane accident, while the rest of us enjoyed one of the most aesthetically distinct and interesting games of the last decade, hacking cameras, beating mutants (they were mutants, right?) with a wrench and shedding a single tear for the tragic Little Sisters. With any luck, *BioShock* will be the first true gaming musical to hit Broadway with the smash-hit heavy-metal soliloquy, "Would you kindly?".



ORANGE BOX

[PC/360/PS3]

Holy headcrabs, Batman – five games for the price of one! The four years since *Half-Life 2*'s 2004 release (two or three eternities in game time) seem never to have passed by, with the groundbreaking title still holding its own with inimitable style. The subsequent *Episodes* are another 10 or 12 hours of explosive ginger-flavoured fun, while *Team Fortress 2* rounds out the guns 'n' violence in a riot of candy-flavoured flamethrowers, rockets, and guns. Finally, Valve's Narbacular Drop-inspired *Portal* scales giddy new heights of bizarre, combining the blackest humour with a rogue AI and cake. Every game collection deserves (nay, demands) the garish orange spine.



ASSASSIN'S CREED

[360/PS3]

It's feisty, it's French, it's fun! Asinine complaints of monotony aside (it's not repetitive if you enjoy doing it!), *Assassin's Creed* is about as fresh as you can get. Altair seethes with the same generic rage that made the *Prince of Persia* Pakour so lovable, even without the ability to dick around with time. Beautiful environments, free-form running and streamlined combat make *Assassin's Creed* one of those games where if you love it you have every right to look down upon people who don't, because stone-cold NAG said so.



COMMAND & CONQUER 3

[PC/360]

The classic *Command & Conquer* franchise came back with a triumphant, Tiberium-enhanced bang. The first series title in years to return to the original Tiberium universe, it recaptured much of the excitement of the original by coming about full circle to its roots: stealth tanks, ion cannons, and the original double-barrelled, rocket packing mammoth tanks. It's a "back-on-track", a return to the frenetic, fast-paced strategy action in close quarters that characterised one of the most hallowed forefathers of the real-time strategy genre.

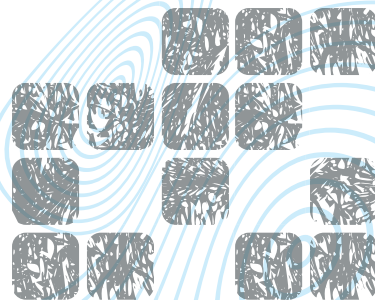




CRYSIS

[PC]

The prettiest tech demo/benchmark of the year. If you need a justification for that expensive graphics card you bought, or just a way to show off your über-rig, *Crysis* is the answer! The game it comes with isn't half bad either. The only downside is that you need a PC that costs about as much as a nano-suit to max out the detail level. The multiplayer didn't seem to catch on for some reason, but running around the jungle beating up Koreans never seems to get old. Any game where you can kill someone by throwing a chicken at them is solid gold.



SAM & MAX: SEASON 1

[PC]

Once upon a time, people played games for this strange thing called fun. There was less emphasis on big names, cloning or sequels of a successful title, or cramming into well-established genres. *Sam & Max: Season 1* was unearthed in a time-capsule, having been developed by game developers stranded in the past by a rogue time machine. Some gamers still long for adventure's heydays, but *Season 1* is the biggest step back towards that golden era yet.



CALL OF DUTY 4

[PC/360/PS3]

Probably the most cinematic gaming experience ever, *Call of Duty 4* crept up onto the 2008 holiday release schedule and destroyed everything else with hollow points and hand grenades. The War on Terror wishes it was *Call of Duty 4*. From the dusty streets of the Middle East, through radiation pockets in Ukraine, and finally a frenetic truck ride, dodging rockets along a Russian highway, every pixel will spit bullet casings onto your carpets. Also features photo-realistic motion-captured visuals, a mission where the sole objective is to crawl until you die, and one of the hottest multiplayer packages this side of a claymore.



FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

[360]

What makes *Forza 2* so cool is that you'd be erring if you judged it too quickly. If you dismissed it for having less-than-cutting-edge graphics, for instance, or for the driving element feeling too "odd" at first. It's only once you've persevered and started scratching beneath the surface that its real beauty presents itself. Jaw-dropping, insanely accurately modeled physics based on pretty much as much data as the Xbox 360's processor is able to provide, which is precisely why the average 30fps framerate was doubled to allow the player to genuinely feel the results of this unflinching focus on realism!



GOD OF WAR 2

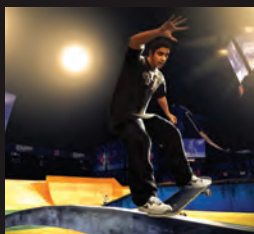
[PS2]

Kratos runs in, Kratos kills everything, Kratos runs out. Sure, *God of War 2* was just "more of the same", more decide, more blood, more puzzles and more beating-people-in-the-head-with-blunt-architecture, but that's exactly what fans wanted. Throw in the new combo system, a few more touches and it's actually the superior game. Practically the premature swansong of the PS2, *God of War 2* remains one of the best (and toughest) games in which you get to be the best and toughest badass mythology has ever seen. It even contains boobies.



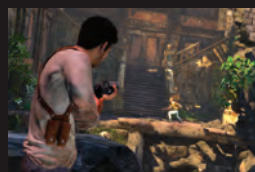
SKATE [360/PS3]

In a genre dominated by Neversoft's long-running *Tony Hawk* franchise, EA's *skate* was an intrepid venture that might've gone horribly wrong. Instead, playing *skate* makes you realise how tired the *Tony Hawk* series actually is - and that gormless clown Bam Margera is mercifully nowhere in sight. Using an innovative and intuitive control system, popping a trick in *skate* actually feels like an accomplishment instead of a button combination, while running a sick line is absolutely exhilarating. It's just like the real thing, only without the big name sponsors, cool shoes, and scabs.



UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE [PS3]

The PlayStation 3 has had a few nice titles since it was launched, but nothing really jumped out, grabbed us by the hair and proceeded to pound us with graphical and gaming goodness. Then veteran developer Naughty Dog released *Uncharted*, quite simply the must-have game on the platform. As we directed Nathan Drake through Amazonian forests, dark tombs, Nazi subs and pirate compounds, at long last we got that hollow feeling in our stomach - that this game won't appear on other platforms. That's exactly a feeling the PS3 needed and it couldn't have been done by a finer game.



WII SPORTS [WII]

Remember kids, just ten minutes of *Wii Tennis* will cancel out three years of rotting on the couch, scoffing chips and playing *Zelda*. It's just that good for you! The fact that *Wii Sports* comes bundled free with your Wii is a good enough reason to consider it money well spent.



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

PEGGLE [PC]

You bounce a ball off pegs in an attempt to totally become a Peggle Master. Time spent at the Peggle Academy remains as magical as Harry Potter and as fun as slash fan-fiction involving Ron Weasley and an irate Griffon.

PUZZLE QUEST [PC/XBLA]

Swap coloured gems ala *Bejeweled* to beat baddies, level up your character and save the kingdom from peril. Even your mom can be a level 70 Fire Mage!

FINAL FANTASY XII [PS2]

This will be a controversial choice, depending on how you feel about the new gambit combat system, but it definitely drew no punches as far as the series is concerned.

CRACKDOWN [360]

Run around a huge city fighting crime, causing destruction, performing stunts, and other surprisingly non-mutually exclusive activities! Oh, and level up while doing it to fight even more crime, cause even more destruction, and perform even more stunts!

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III [PC/PS3]

The long anticipated *Unreal Tournament III* has arrived! So throw away that old FPS with its many guns and running around shooting people in strange places, and pick up this new FPS with its many guns and running around shooting people in strange places! It's now extra shiny!

RATCHET & CLANK: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION [PS3]

"It looks just like a Pixar movie" is what every magazine keeps saying, but to be fair, for once they're right. The fuzzy furball and robot duo look better than ever, and the game ain't bad either. Bit short, but worth ever second.

WORLD IN CONFLICT [PC]

World in Conflict distills RTS down to the fun parts, smashing the other guy to a good soundtrack! Forget about harvesting magical crystals, siphoning strange gasses, or building energy for matter-conversion reactors and just go make things explode!

SUPREME COMMANDER [PC]

Command huge armies in epic battles on maps so big nuclear weapons are to scale! *Supreme Commander* brought features such as infinite zoom and dual-monitor support to the RTS genre. How can you take any RTS without giant robots seriously after this?

OVERLORD [PC/360]

Command a teeming horde of devoted gremlins, while you stomp around a fairytale kingdom butchering elves, fireballing unicorns, and pulling up the sunflowers. Evil never runs, it walks. On occasion, it may saunter.

HALO 3 [360]

The antithesis of gritty *Unreal*-styled gore gaming, *Halo 3* trots out an FPS experience dripping with hallucinogenic colours and vehicles named after cuddly animals. The single-player campaign is a robust affair, but the game's real charm lies in its ridiculously addictive multiplayer. See the weeks and months and significant others slip through your fingers while you run around Guardian with a Gravity Hammer.



THE WORST OF 2007



FEATURE: WHAT'S HOT

SOMETIMES A GAME GOES BAD AND IF YOU DON'T NOTICE, YOU MAY TAKE A BITE BEFORE REALISING YOU'RE ALLERGIC TO MOULD AND NOW YOU'RE GOING TO DIE. BE SURE TO AVOID THESE GAMES AT ALL COST. WE DON'T WANT YOU TO DIE.



MOTORSTORM

[PS3]

Motorstorm delivers off-road racing with realistic physics: your car will realistically roll over, bump into other cars that try to pass you and wind up flipping you over, and even realistically fall off of cliffs when you try to take most of the turns on the tracks. To add insult to injury, *DirT* came out shortly after and showed exactly how it should be done.



LAIR

[PS3]

Look! Up in the sky! Is it a bird? Is it a plane? How about a dragon? Given the control scheme, you'll probably think it's a drunken whale once you're flying it. The classic tragedy of style over substance, it has pretty graphics but ugly gameplay. So bad, it makes you want to go out and beat up the first lizard you see.



DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

[PS2/PC]

Driver: Parallel Lines [PS2/PC]: The issue at hand here is not whether this is a good game. Instead, we'd love to know what idiot at Atari thought that taking *Driver* so far from its roots just to capture the *GTA* demographic was a good idea. Everything about this game suggests that the real decision makers behind it don't really play games and certainly don't appreciate why *Driver* was an excellent title.



TRANSFORMERS

[PS2/360/PS3/PC]

After all the glory, excitement and "wow" of the movie, and then game goes and wastes a good opportunity. There's so much wrong with the *Transformers* game, figuring out where to begin listing flaws is the hardest part. Sure sold like it was made of gold, but we blame grandparents for those sales.



VAMPIRE RAIN

[360]

When you play a game that really isn't good, you often wonder how the developers even went so far as releasing it. Then you remember that despite your feelings, there are usually people who really enjoy the game for one reason or another. Still, it boggles the mind that such a dull, dumbed-down and yet frustratingly difficult game ever made it past the play testers.



HELLGATE: LONDON

[PC]

No LAN play, tons of bugs, lacklustre design, poorly conceived skills... Flagship's flagship game failed to leave its mark, other than some bruising. Some still love it, but even poo has fans (flies). We'd be willing to forgive almost all trespasses, but not the lack of LAN play. Never, ever, make a *Diablo*-style game without including LAN play, that's just stupid.



STAR TREK: LEGACY

[PC/360]

It hurts all that much more because there just hasn't been a good *Star Trek* game since *Birth of the Federation*. It's almost incomprehensible how Bethesda could have developed such a terrible game when you have so much awesomeness to draw upon.



WHAT'S GREAT IN 2008

WE'RE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED FUTUROLOGISTS AND HAVE EVEN TRAVELLED IN TIME. WE'RE BACK NOW, FROM THE FUTURE. WE'VE BROUGHT YOU SOME LIFE-CHANGING INFORMATION THAT MAY HELP YOU SURVIVE THE IMPENDING APOCALYPSE. WAIT, WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO TELL YOU ABOUT THAT.

PROTOTYPE

[PS3/360/PC]

Miktar is betting this will be the sleeper hit of the year. Game of the Year for 2008 material even. He may be crazy, but there is method to that madness. It looks like "Assassin's Crackdown in future New York" and you can leap off the top of buildings to Hulk-smash the traffic below. Eating people lets you turn into them, eating monsters lets you become them. It certainly has all the ducks in a line for a gritty, action-packed experience: and they promise an actual plot too.



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

[PS3/360/PSP]

A spin-off series, *Bad Company* is a standard first-person shooter with emphasis on environmental destruction and humorous buddy interactions in a single-player focus. Two soldiers spot a truck carrying gold and decide to help themselves, their adventure taking them around the world. It will have multiplayer that more resembles the traditional *Battlefield* staple, but the goal is really to create a single-player experience with humour, destruction and tons of stuff to shoot.



GHOSTBUSTERS

[PC/PS3/360/WII]

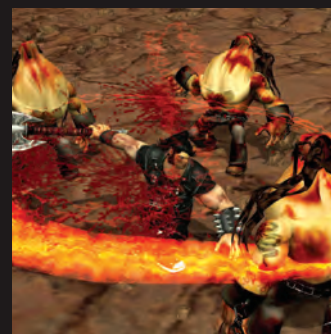
We called, and they finally picked up the phone! Egon, Ray, Peter, and Winston will be crossing streams on a platform near you sometime around October, Gozer willing. With a story penned by the original *Ghostbusters* writers and starring Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, and most of the actors joining the voice talent crew, this one's gonna be bigger than the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man. No cooperative play though, which totally ruined Christmas.



BRUTAL LEGEND

[360/PS3]

The plot is pretty straightforward: Eddie Riggs, roadie for a Heavy Metal band, has an accident tuning a guitar and bleeds on his cursed belt buckle, which transports him into a Heavy Metal and Nordic fantasy-inspired alternate history where demons have enslaved humanity. As a third-person action game, Eddie wields a battle axe as a melee weapon and a guitar as his secondary magical weapon. The third weapon in his arsenal is The Deuce: a drop-top coupe Eddie builds out of spare parts he finds. The cherry on top: comedian/actor/vocalist/god Jack Black voices Eddie.



BORDERLANDS

[PC/360/PS3]

After *Brothers in Arms*, there's a lot of interest in Gearbox's next title. And it's going to be a science-fiction FPS with RPG elements in a *Mad Max* inspired universe... Do want! Little is known about the gameplay, but so far signs point to: four-player cooperative play, customisable vehicles, customisable characters and dead enemies dropping equipment. The game will also have random terrain and item generation, allowing for 500,000 different guns and 500,000 different item and armour variants. With no loading screens, so they say.



DRAGON AGE

[PC]

It seems *Dragon Age* is the "spiritual successor" to *Baldur's Gate*, according to BioWare. A gritty fantasy epic told in ArPeeGee, it totes an open-ended storyline, story-driven campaign, full character customisation, mama-based magic system, party-based gameplay and a top-down 'combat mode' aside the third-person 'exploration mode'. Race selection will incorporate an 'origin' story, so your Dwarf Nobel will actually begin as part of the royal family in a Dwarven city, while a commoner starts in the gutters of the same city. Personal nemesis is also a feature.



DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

[PC]

Yes, it's actually going to be released! George Broussard went on record last year to say "we f**ked up", and now the game is actually being properly funded and developed. It's going to be a strange universe to live in when *Forever* is actually released, but for some reason we think the Duke will pull through and provide a first-person shooting experience sorely lacking in the industry today: one that kicks ass and chews bubblegum, sans gum. You gotta believe!



SIMMERING NICELY

THESE NEED A LITTLE MORE TIME BEFORE THEY'RE TENDER ENOUGH TO ENJOY, NOT THAT WE MIND AL DENTE.

Rage [PS3/360/PC]: And here we were, thinking master programmer John Carmack was done with the whole gaming thing. id Software promises a "Mad-Max inspired FPS with racing elements", which sounds like it could be good or utterly terrible.

Haze [PS3]: Nothing wrong with another FPS, but the bar has been set pretty high thanks to *Call of Duty 4* and such. *Haze* boasts some narcotic-powered superpowers and gritty environments, complete with a supposedly dark and interesting plot.

Far Cry 2 [PC/PS3/360]: It's looking good! You can set the veldt on fire to flush out enemies and the dynamic weather adds a little atmosphere to your first-person shooting rampage through Africa.

Spore [PC]: Will Wright's sim-everything "massively single-player online game" will see you designing, nurturing, and maintaining your very own little monstrosities. Ween and potty train them, love them, cherish them, and finally make them eat each other - IN SPACE!

Left 4 Dead [PC/360]: Turtlerock attempts to redeem itself for *Condition Zero* by giving us a four-player cooperative zombie-survival shooter. About damn time.

Alone in the Dark [Multi]: Edward Carnby is back (not that we know how; time-travel perhaps?) and stuck in a strange supernatural dilemma localised around New York's Central Park. It's still dark, so not much is known about it, but this may finally make up for *Alone in the Dark 4*.

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway [PC/PS3/360]: This game is taking far too long to be realised. New features include new specialised squad units and a more *Gears of War*-style cover system. Oh, and civilians too.

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames [PC/360/PS2/PS3]: Set in Venezuela (much to the chagrin of real-life Venezuela), *Merc 2* will have "completely destructible environments" and a "state-of-the-art fire engine" the pyrotechnic kind, not the vehicle.

StarCraft II [PC]: Yay! More *StarCraft*! Basically they've taken the *WarCraft 3* Engine, beefed it up a little and crammed in the *StarCraft* experience with a few gameplay innovations. Will single-handedly improve South Korea's economy.

Alan Wake [PC/360]: From the people who gave us *Max Payne* comes a psychological action thriller with some stunning visuals. Apparently, your most useful weapon will be a flashlight, helping you attack the darkness that's trying to kill poor Alan.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction [360/PC]: The fifth game in the series, Sam Fisher is now 53 years old and trying to escape from the fuzz, in the year 2010. Set almost entirely in open urban areas, you'll be able to use crowds for cover, distraction or defence. Every object will be usable, even bits of paper. Now that's depth!

Fallout 3 [PC/360/PS3]: Break out your Pip-Boys and let's hit the wasteland! *Fallout 3* is looking hotter than a radscorpion in heat, and we can't wait to see if we can kill kiddies like in the good old days.

Half-Life 2: Episode Three [PC]: *Episode Two* rocked harder than a hotrod on a bridge, and while information about its successor is currently under lock and key over at Valve HQ, we're confident that the series finale will melt your face.

Grand Theft Auto 4 [PS3/360]: Niko Bellic has come to Liberty City to steal your money, make sexy time with your voo-men, and throw you off building. We've no idea what's going to be the controversial kicker for Rockstar's latest, but we're sure Jack Thompson will find something to write pamphlets about.

Tom Clancy's Endwar [PS3/360/PC]: It's World War III and *Endwar* is there as a "kind of RTS". Units gain experience, and you'll be able to command them via voice over headset. The viewpoint of the game will be from the perspective of one of the units on the battlefield, as you swap between them.

Command & Conquer: Tiberium [PS3/PC/360]: Set 11 years after the events in *C&C3*, *Tiberium* attempts to bring the *C&C* franchise to the FPS genre and perhaps this time, unlike *C&C: Renegade*, they'll actually get it right.

Turok [PC/PS3/360]: It is a scientifically proven fact that games with dinosaurs are better than games without dinosaurs. *Turok* games were quite bad in the past, but this one is looking sweet. You can lure dinosaurs into the enemy camp to cause havoc.

Army of Two [360/PS3]: Built from the ground up to be a cooperative experience, any game that lets you do a high-five with your buddy is automatically worth it. It helps that *Army of Two* is also looking to be a good game, and very politically incorrect. Just the way we like it.

Halo Wars [360]: We're not sure if an RTS based on the *Halo* universe is going to work, but considering how few RTS titles have been released of late, we'll take anything we can get. There is hope that Master Chief will be a Hero unit that wins you the game and gets you the cybernetic AI girl.

Final Fantasy XIII [PS3]: Squeenix has more rabid loyal gold-spending fans than a Pop Idol with a double-D cup-size, but at least they make good games. The Neverending Fantasy continues with *XIII*. Every sword is also a gun, every bad guy has a scar, ever city is under threat of being destroyed by rampaging Bahamut. Works for us.

Rainbow Six Vegas 2 [PC/PS3/360]: Features include an enhanced version of the Persistent Elite Creation system, a new stat-tracking feature, more weapons, more maps and a refined cooperative mode that lets you play co-op at any time in the single-player campaign.

Resident Evil 5 [PS3/360]: Set in Haiti, lead character Chris Redfield can now get sunstroke and see mirages and hallucinations if he doesn't get into the shade. It's expected to play like *RE4*, which is a good thing, but with even smarter, faster "zombies". Fight in the shade!

Star Wars: Force Unleashed [Multi]: Two-player dual mode for the Wii confirmed! Using the fancy new "Digital Molecular Matter" and "Euphoria" systems for nice environments and nice enemy animations, the game takes place seven years after *Episode III*, before *IV*, and focuses on Vader's secret apprentice: you.

Indiana Jones [Multi]: Not much is known about the plot, only that it is set in 1939, and features a sequence set in San Francisco, involving a brawl outside a fireworks factory, and a fight atop a runaway cable car. It uses the same nifty tech as *Force Unleashed*

for realistic animations. Mr. Jones, has never looked so good.

Killzone 2 [PS3]: Bigger, better, stronger, faster, prettier: that's pretty much the gist of it. Not much else is known, but you can rest assured that as a first-person shooter, there will be shooting, from the first person, with guns.

Metal Gear Solid 4 [PS3]: Controlling an old man, you must use stealth, cunning and a robotic drone to take down Liquid Snake, chasing him from the Middle East, through South America, all the way to Eastern Europe and the Arctic Ring. Not bad for someone who should be on pension.

White Knight Chronicles [PS3]: Like most console RPGs, you'll go around killing little blobby things until taking on a god. Level-5 has revealed that some enemies will be "Shadow of the Colossus" sized, leading to Epic Battle Situations. The combat system looks interesting: real time with linking commands.

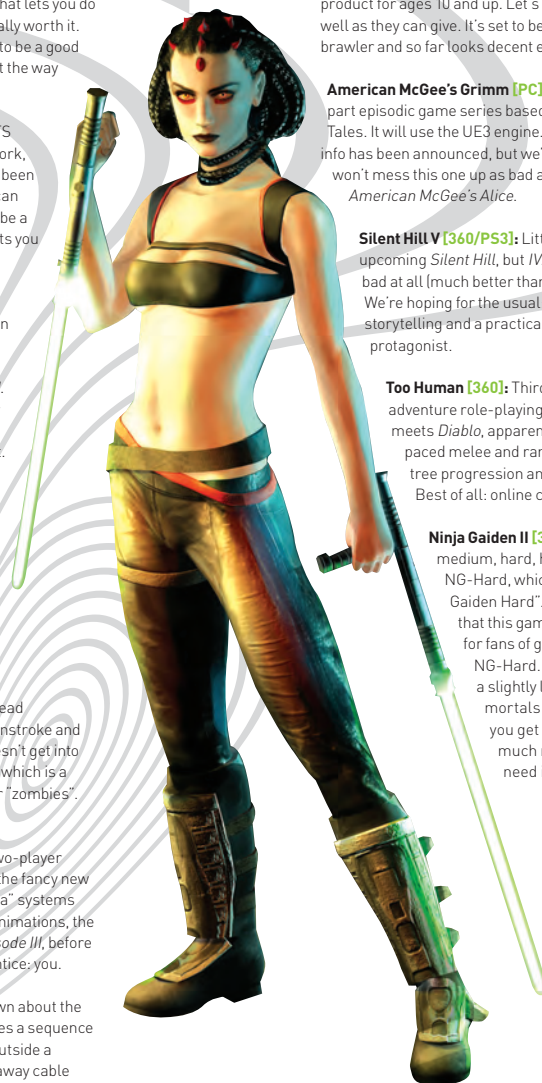
Penny Arcade Adventures [PC/XBLA]: Internet celebrities Gabe and Tycho of *Penny Arcade* fame have been ripping into games for years with their acrid wit. Finally, they're appearing in their own entertainment product for ages 10 and up. Let's see if they can take as well as they can give. It's set to be a Golden-Axe-style brawler and so far looks decent enough.

American McGee's Grimm [PC]: An upcoming 24-part episodic game series based on Grimm's Fairy Tales. It will use the UE3 engine. That's it. No more info has been announced, but we're hoping McGee won't mess this one up as bad as he did the ending of *American McGee's Alice*.

Silent Hill V [360/PS3]: Little is known about the upcoming *Silent Hill*, but *IV: The Room* wasn't bad at all (much better than *Silent Hill 3* by far). We're hoping for the usual: exceptionally creepy storytelling and a practically useless lead protagonist.

Too Human [360]: Third-person action adventure role-playing game, *Devil May Cry* meets *Diablo*, apparently. There will be fast-paced melee and ranged combat, skill-tree progression and dungeon crawling. Best of all: online cooperative play.

Ninja Gaiden II [360]: There's easy, medium, hard, hardcore, and then NG-Hard, which stands for "Ninja Gaiden Hard". We have a feeling that this game will be awesome for fans of games that are NG-Hard. Hopefully it will have a slightly lower difficulty for mortals as well. And hey, you get to play a Ninja! How much more cool do you need in a game? **NAG**



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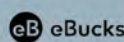
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The Reward of Choice



WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

ORCS & ELVES [DS]

If you've ever played *Ultima Underworld*, then we can safely say that *Orcs & Elves* from id Software (yes, the *Doom* guys) is like a *Ultima Underworld* diet, with a talking wand. To everyone else: it's a funny, easy, masterfully straightforward first-person, turn-based, dungeon-crawling RPG where the most difficult quest so far has been to get as drunk as a Dwarven ghost. The simple (yet surprisingly deep) combat and well-crafted levels lend themselves to quick dungeon hunts during a few free moments.

WIPEOUT PULSE [PSP]

So you're in this anti-gravity racer, right, and you're going at like 400kph down a sheer vertical drop and the only reason you know you're not going to become a wet smear of twisted metal and mushy bits once you hit the curve at the bottom is because (a) the mag-lev strips keep you attached to the surface, and (b) it's a videogame, fool. And because videogames exist, each and every one of us gets the chance to be an anti-gravity racer. We take every opportunity we get.

GAMING JOURNALISM [RL]

The best game to play, we've found, is to pretend we're gaming journalists. It doesn't have a manual, so it's a bit hard at the bits that require obscene amounts of manual dexterity, but ultimately the plot is really fascinating and the constant innovations in level design really make this one hard to put down. It's multiplayer, but like most multiplayer games, it's only really fun when you play with friends.

CHARADES [RL]

It's a duck! No, wait... two words, okay, it's two words. First word... noun. No? Verb. Duck! No... Okay, log? Yes, log? LOG! Okay, second word... two syllables. Foreign? Russian? No, is it a country? Yes, okay... I don't get it, do you guys know what he's doing? Dude, you really suck at this. I didn't think it was possible for someone to suck at charades. Let's play *Pictionary* instead. Ramjet, stop drawing that penis.

THIS AND THAT [VARIOUS]

Doing a quick poll, this is what the various people in and around the NAG office are busy distracting themselves with: *Mass Effect*, *Call of Duty 4*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Guild Wars*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Unreal Tournament III*, *Ace Combat 6*, *Need For Speed: Pro Street*, *skate*, *Overlord*, *Halo 3*, *Hellgate: London*, *Motorstorm*, *Heroes of Might and Magic: Tribes of the East*, *Virtua Tennis 3*, *Raving Rabbids*, *Battlefield 2*, *Worms*, *Piggs Peak Poker*, *Switchball*, *Sacred*, *Sam & Max Season 2 Episode 2*, *Command & Conquer 3* and *Warbook*. Rawk.

064



068



070



074



072



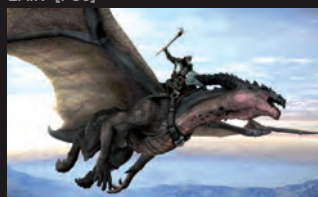
WEB SCORES

ASSASSIN'S CREED [360]



NAG	90
METACRITIC	82
GAMERANKINGS	83

LAIR [PS3]

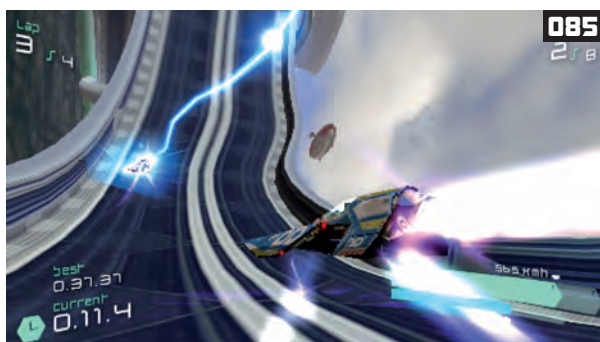


NAG	74
METACRITIC	53
GAMERANKINGS	55

MASS EFFECT [360]



NAG	92
METACRITIC	91
GAMERANKINGS	91



BUT SERIOUSLY...

The reviewers at NAG are not only passionate about gaming, but they donate to charity. No self-proffessed gaming experts here (no matter what other magazines may believe), just gamers who do this for fun and try to do a good job while they're at it. Let's meet the team...

James Francis

Upgraded from mild-mannered Features Editor to full-blown missile-launching Editor of NAG, James finally has the time to actually play games now that he can delegate the real work to everyone else. He's totally an Xbox 360 whore and proud of it, having recently thrown his laptop out the window because it couldn't play *Sacred*. Reformed gamer.



Justin Slabbert

A freelance newbie, Justin makes sweet love to his PS3 every chance he gets and may be prone to inflated scores as long as Sony keeps putting money in his back pocket. The man is delusional. Fanboy gamer.



Alex Jelagin

When not playing Warbook, Alex plays *Magic: The Gathering* and beats Miktar at chess, violently. Alex digs them ArPeeGees and has a picture of a naked woman as the wallpaper on his PSP, which is fine. But it makes borrowing the PSP rather awkward. Gamer.



Miktar Dragon

Born out of the semantic orgasm of imagination raping sheer determination up the butt, Miktar may not know everything there is to know about games, but he sure as all heck knows more than you do, generally. It's all tacit knowledge, baby. Able to ignore tall buildings in a single bound, Miktar is all about the games. Totally.



Sean James

We send him stuff to review when it's the type of game that when you hold it up in the office and shout, "Who wants to review this?" everyone quietly pretends that they're actually looking at a really, really interesting picture of a cat with some funny text under it. That, and sports stuff. Gamer. Kinda. Totally.



Adam Liebman

Long-time freelancer, Adam thinks that 70% is "average" and thinks *LAIR* is a "good game". Yeah, we don't know how that works either, but he's not a bad reviewer so we keep him around. Mostly a gamer, totally.



Tarryn van der Byl

Able to out-drink practically anyone in the office, with the exception of Miktar and perhaps Alex, Tarryn will kick your ass at any game that involves awesome (so that excludes BS like Counter-Strike: Sauce, sorry). Totally a gamer.



Walt Pretorius

Formerly known as Shryke, Walt went walkabout in the Australian outback trying to "find himself", but only managed to get poisoned by drinking water off the back of a frog. Currently in command of a legion of Websites, poised to take over the world, he does mobile stuff but is totally a gamer.



NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET [360]

NAG	79
METACRITIC	73
GAMERANKINGS	74

SIMCITY SOCIETIES [PC]

NAG	70
METACRITIC	62
GAMERANKINGS	62

TABULA RASA [PC]

NAG	68
METACRITIC	77
GAMERANKINGS	79

mmm... SHINY!

A quick guide to the NAG Review section



PC SPEC: Will this game rape your machine, or make it fly? Check the box at the bottom right for an explanation on our fancy hardware rating system.

BETTER THAN/WORSE THAN: Everything is relative, right? Because of that, we keep making comparisons between games in this space, and try to be funny about it.

SCORE: You only care about this number, we know that. But try to pretend you read the reviews because they're so insightful and informative. Thank you, we love you.

VITAL INFO: A game can't survive without these vitals, so you should probably pay attention to them.

PLATFORMS: The brightest block is the platform on which the game was reviewed. Dimmer blocks are platforms on which the game also appears. Simple.

AWARDS: You won't find these NAG awards given to games of merit anywhere but in NAG. Truth.

GAME NAME: This is the important bit, and you might want to write it down somewhere just in case you need it later.

BOTTOM LINE: It all comes down to this, and the words written here will shape the future, moulding it towards gaming excellence.

ICONS: Check the list on the right for our frikkin' 'sweet icons, distilling the essence of games even further, just for you.

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For your convenience, the numbers of the distribution companies

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THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like, while giving us less work to do in the review. Everyone wins, so best memorise this list below and look out for them in the Review score box.



ACTION: When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.



BABYSITTING: Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.



BITCHIN': When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.



BORING: Grab your blankie and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.



BUGGY: Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.



CASH-IN/LICENSE: Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.



CINEMATIC: Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.



CLONE: We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.



COMPETITIVE: You don't think Ranked Match is a feature, you think it should be mandatory.



FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? Careful, it might be Foreign!



ONLINE: For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.



PARTY: Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.



PIECE OF POO: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.



STUPID PEOPLE: Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.



ALL AGES: These games contain no violence, immoral acts or anything that might narrow the demographic, but they may still be diffi cult.



KID FRIENDLY: Kids can play this game without needing an adult every five minutes to explain to them what button to press.



16+ RESTRICTION: If you're 16 or over, you are well within your rights to play this game.



18+ RESTRICTION: If you are not yet 18, please put down this game and back away slowly before the police come and arrest you.



MULTIPLAYER: The number on the contoller icon indicates the maximum number of people who can play at the same time.

WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

- 5 Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**
- 4 Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX8; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**
- 3 Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**
- 2 Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**
- 1 You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee fi rst thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**

ASUS EAH3870 TOP

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MASS EFFECT

MASS EFFECT HAS TAUGHT me that I am a benevolent, if megalomaniac, ruler. It takes about six hours before your main character, Shepard, becomes a Spectre. But from there on it's smooth sailing - so to speak. Being a Spectre, you can do pretty much what you want to, so the subtle art of diplomacy takes on a new dimension. If you upset everyone and call them names (or shoot people they like), you won't get chased out of the galaxy by a howling mob. But they aren't going to help you either (and they might attempt to shoot you first). Perhaps you don't need the help. Since I opted for a pure soldier (equivalent to a barbarian or fighter class), I could shoot my way out of nearly any situation. Sure, some tech missions and salvages aren't open to a soldier, given your nonexistent tech level, but provided you shove points into the charm and intimidate skills, you can get quite far. And far you can go, especially when you start scouting through the various planets in the game.

The sub-quest planets you can land on allow you to rumble all over the place with an all-terrain vehicle that is impossible to crash. Pick fights with big space worms, blow up cults or mercenaries, find relics and crashed probes...

Well, that's pretty much it. If you had to count *Mass Effect* for its pieces, there isn't a lot. Despite the many planets, not a lot can be landed on and what you do on them is limited. There also seems to be a distinct lack of civilisation - apart from the Citadel everything else is a colony ruined by monsters or shacks in a dust bowl. The main mission planets are breathtaking, but none of them feel like an active hub where you can haggle your head off and find something to do. If anything, *Mass Effect* is a pretty shallow RPG experience.

But taken as a whole, it's terrific. Sure, there's not a lot of depth, but the presentation and story make up for a lot of it. Shepard is promoted to the first human Spectre by the council, a group of various alien races aligned to one cause: not killing each other. Thanks to a few wars and a lot of baggage, there's an underlying tone of interstellar racism in *Mass Effect*. Not everyone feels the same, but as the commander of humanity's most advanced ship, many humans aren't happy about the aliens on board. Meanwhile, a lot of aliens regard humans as uppity. Fortunately, they think worse things of the rest of the weird creatures you'll meet. How Shepard reacts to this is your choice, but it creates a nice subtext to a lot that happens in the game.



Initially Shepard's promotion is aimed at stopping Saren, a rogue spectre who seems bent on destroying humanity. But soon enough you'll discover he's planning something much bigger than threatening all the known galactic civilisations. Of course, the council doesn't believe you. Fortunately, that doesn't matter much, providing you kick ass and take names.

There's much in *Mass Effect* that could make it a flawed game. RPG players seeking a deep experience with statistics and skills will feel short-changed, while the inventory system is a bit limited on information when you try to manage your squad's equipment. All too often I bought the wrong armour or weapons because the crew stats are not all always on hand. Speaking of which, if you opt for a less combat-heavy class, your squad is pretty vital in missions, but they can also die rather quickly and leave you up the creek. While you can pause during combat to activate squad features, the pause-and-decide system seen in BioWare's other games is strangely missing. On top of it all, *Mass Effect* is not really that big and ultimately it will take far less time to complete than epics like *Neverwinter Nights*.

But despite all that (and other small issues) it's hard to find fault with this game. When playing *Mass Effect*, you get a vision of RPG's future - and it's a juicy future indeed. Since I had a blast playing the *KOTOR* games, *Mass Effect* is terrific and embraces its console foundation wholeheartedly. It's not the best RPG ever developed (personally I

NAG EDITOR'S CHOICE



think *Baldur's Gate* still remains a bigger step up), but it definitely is a milestone for both new gamers and salted RPG veterans. **NAG**
James "Jack Bauer" Francis

I AM NOT HAPPY!

While RPGs have boasted strong stories and conversation trees for a while now, the characters still remain fairly static observers, often smudging that suspension of disbelief you're trying so hard to hold onto. With *Mass Effect*, as has been widely publicised, BioWare aimed to create very detailed and highly articulate characters - and by and large it succeeded. Sure, watching the characters languishing around the world is still similar to games like *KOTOR*, though with higher poly counts, but when you engage in a conversation all the small nuances and reactions come out. Imagine the kind of detail usually found in in-game cut-scenes - *Mass Effect* finally succeeds in making those a gameplay reality. Granted, the game doesn't really exploit this and you never really need to read the body language of the person you are trying to talk to, given the fairly straight-forward dialogue system. But it does draw you into the game and suddenly even the most mundane conversation becomes pretty entertaining. Unfortunately, the expressions aren't as varied on the aliens as they are on the human characters, but it's all just a matter of refinement. At the very least, it's leaps and bounds ahead of the mannequins that populated *Oblivion*.



SECOND OPINION

THE YEAR IS 2183. Galactic colonialism is all the rage, as humanity trawls the vastness of space for new planets to wreck with non-biodegradables, nuclear warfare, and tabloid celebrities. In the midst of all this hubris, the human Systems Alliance Military floats around the universe maintaining some semblance of lawfulness in order to placate the understandably alarmed aliens who were there first. After all, most of them are still reeling from a series of inter-species wars that spanned decades and star clusters, and left everyone a tad bitter and xenophobic. Add to all that the inevitable complications of politics, megacorporations, mysteriously vanished civilisations, and an insidious menace on the rise, and it's really just an adaptation of a Richard Morgan novel, only here they're called Spectres instead of Envoys.

Mass Effect sprawls. It's a space opera with all the trimmings – strange new worlds, romance, robots, and The Fate of It All Resting Upon One Man/Woman's Shoulders. It's also a classy RPG with robust multi-class characterisation options, oodles of collectible stuff, electrifying cinematic combat, and your very own shiny spaceship. This is absolutely essential gaming for anyone even remotely interested in RPGs, as the genre now forges bravely on into a new generation.

92
OUT OF 100

Tarryn "Renegade +32" van der Byl



Why the long face?



FAST TALKER

The game's story is remarkable not only for its scope, but – perhaps more importantly – its coherency. A convoluted story obfuscated by side-quests and even itself is the failing of all too many RPGs, but *Mass Effect* holds its own with enviable style. Borrowing liberally from well-established science fiction standards like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and *Battlestar Galactica*, the unfolding narrative relies as much on the player's tacit understanding and acceptance of existing social and political structures as on the evidence presented during the course of the game. Thus liberated from the shackles of laboured explanation, much of the story is forwarded via conversation with your crewmates and NPCs, using a unique dialogue system that feels almost eerily natural. And forget about the rising price of rocket fuel – conversation topics tend towards the morally and ethically thought-provoking, and may call for some serious deliberation.

Additionally, your character's morality may be determined by your conversation choices – the maxim "if you've nothing nice to say, don't say it" carries no weight in *Mass Effect*. Choosing a brutal avenue of interrogation, for example, will net you a few Renegade (bad) points in the process, while handing out hugs and lollipops will reward you with Paragon (good) points. While these may seem inconsequential at the time, your actions are likely to have far-reaching consequences. In the meantime, we can only recommend you invest some XP in your Charm or Intimidate conversation talents.

Oblivion



Knights of the Old Republic



BOTTOM LINE

Join the navy, make friends, shoot aliens and shag someone.





During droughts cliff-divers have it rough

ASSASSIN'S CREED

ASSASSIN'S CREED IS A bit like having a really hot girlfriend: because she's hot, you'll put up with her moods and all the problems she causes. However, unlike the hot girlfriend, *Assassin's Creed* fortunately isn't a very long relationship threatening to push you to the brink of a breakdown. In reality, if you do everything except find the flags and kill the sixty Templars (AC's two 'find-hidden-stuff' mini-quests), it shouldn't take you more than ten hours to complete - possibly even less. However, AC's a gaming experience you shouldn't rush for any reason. You should savour it: experience the nice city designs, take in the impressive crowd system, enjoy the horse rides. It might seem tedious to travel between cities, but it gives you the chance to enjoy the game by not rushing things. Since you can teleport to a city once you've travelled there once, horse riding scarcely features in most of the game.

The game seems to follow this trend. It's worthwhile savouring things at the start. Later in the game there will be no time for such sightseeing, especially once you start scaling some high buildings. When not cat-lining across rooftops or free-climbing towers, castles and cathedrals, the ancient world will witness what a death machine you are. Combat is a series of counters, dodges and attacks, punctuated by timing. Since you fight defensively, it's a matter of watching for attacks or guards dropping their attention. Initially you might need to bash guards - once you have the counter ability, Altair takes full advantage of his enemies' slowness. Subsequent abilities offset more and more moves that guards try using. Eventually, you finish a street fight and are surrounded by thirty or more soldiers, dead or groaning their way towards death. And lead protagonist Altair seems superhuman. Once all of his abilities are unlocked, there's very little that can go wrong in a fight, and he's the ultimate badass. And what, ladies and gentlemen, is





PS3 OPINION

Assassin's Creed was definitely one of the most-anticipated games of 2007. It's also one of the more controversial games in terms of reviews. Some love it and some hate it. Personally, I think that it's one of the best games I've played over the holidays. There's just something exhilarating about running over rooftops and diving off tall buildings onto haystacks below, not to mention the thrill of the kill when an assassination goes as planned. Even a botched attempt is fun because of the cool swordplay.

In fact, the combat system is so good that a player can get lost while looking for confrontations with the guards (or even the Templars). Players can also get lost in the scenery, stunning cities and landscapes during crusades. Quite simply, *AC* is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you are going to pull out, but you know it's going to be sweet and delicious.

In terms of the story, the developers of *AC* tried something new with events taking place during the Middle Ages and futuristic lab settings. While it may sound like two complete opposite ends of the scale, the developers bridged the gap quite well and came up with a very intriguing and twisting plot, which will leave you wanting more.

Throughout the game, every so often the game would freeze and only a reboot of the PS3 would fix the problem (this only seems to plague this version of the game). In the end, *Assassin's Creed* is well worth the money on any console, but a few flaws with the PS3 version leaves it a bit tarnished.

85
OUT OF 100

Justin Slabbert

the point of an action game if you're not the guy who pees on John Rambo's picnic?

AC is not a deep game and the plot is, at best, digestible (though it does manage a few nice touches). The whole task of investigating your target is equally limited and feels more like items on a shopping list than an exercise in mental ability. The rest of the tasks just unlock helpful allies like scholars you can blend in with or vigilantes who will grab soldiers or block their path if you're being chased. The real reason for your existence is to run across the rooftops and stab hapless soldiers on their patrols, ultimately stalking your main target and shaking a hornets' nest when you stab him.

The catch is that *Assassin's Creed* refines running around a city and beating up its security force to a subtle art. If you go in bashing buttons and kicking every citizen who crosses your path, you will hate this game. However, if you understand the basic nuances of finesse and timing, it's a game superior to anything yet developed in the *Crackdown* or *Prince of Persia* mould. That, in my opinion, makes it a pretty damn good game - one of the best, providing you want a sandbox action experience. **NAG**

James Francis

NAG
MUST
PLAY

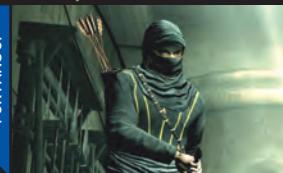


Crackdown



KINDA LIKE

Arab Ninjas



FOR FANS OF



BOTTOM LINE

Crackdown + Prince of Persia + Pakur = Super assassin.

90
OUT OF 100



This man does not fear cross winds





NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET

THE NEED FOR SPEED franchise has in the past brought us games of varying quality. Some of the games, like the Porsche tribute title, were absolutely fantastic, while others were a little more questionable. Major questions arose around the time when the *Underground* games appeared. The street racing idea was great, and tricking cars out in terms of performance and visuals was fun... However, for the most part, the games were a little too arcade-like, with no discernable damage model and races that were a little too over the top. They were fun games, but serious racing enthusiasts never took to them.

With *ProStreet*, the developers have taken a new and arguably better path. The most noticeable change is that the racing has been taken off the streets (which might be due to some kind of guilt-complex about 'promoting' illegal street racing) and stuck firmly on a controlled track environment. The tracks are 'uglier' than the flashy city streets the game was set in before, but the graphics are still a massive improvement over past titles. Excellent environment mapping and vehicle modelling are the order of the day, and the very wide variety of look-customisation choices make for a very pretty game indeed.

The next (and possibly most significant) change is the introduction of vehicle damage. This affects the game in many ways: on track, a damaged car performs poorly (and looks terrible) while it also hurts the player's pocket

in Career mode. This is a very welcome change, and elevates the game above arcade-racer status. The physics have also been ramped up, resulting in cars that act and feel more realistic than before.

The result is a game that feels a lot more like *Forza* than *Need for Speed*. The fun element is still there, but the game has a more serious tone. The addition of things like suggested racing lines further cement this seriousness.

Aside from the obvious multiplayer and quick race modes, *ProStreet* offers the player a compelling Career mode. A number of race modes (and 'sub-modes') are available, including improved drift competitions and drag races. The Career mode focuses on race meets, and players need to 'dominate' these events to truly perform well. Winning a race day isn't enough: domination results in extra cash and prizes to further the player's career.

With a wide variety of vehicles, customisable race days and generally improved performance, *Need for Speed: ProStreet* is the best *Need for Speed* title in long time. A few fans of the series may not like the removal of the 'bad-boy-racer' feel of the game, but those who enjoy a good racing experience more than being a virtual criminal should enjoy this title more than the previous few titles. It's not quite *Forza* yet, but a definite step in the right direction. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

SECOND OPINION

Back to thrill us again, the next *Need for Speed* title has arrived. A little different from its predecessors, it's still a whole lot of fun crammed into a slick title. The first thing to hit you – and it hits you hard – is the amazing graphics: realistic-looking enemies all waiting to be passed. Throw in one of the best damage models ever to grace our screens, and you have one of the best-looking racers ever developed. The modding has also been greatly upgraded. You can easily change wheels and the shape of body mods. Remember though, graphics aren't everything. The performance mods are what you'd expect, but you definitely feel the difference. As for decals, don't expect what you saw in *Forza*. Make no mistake, *ProStreet* isn't perfect: it has a limited, boring soundtrack. It also boasts a rather weird control system. But hey, a couple of laps and you'll be screaming for more. Some people might be a bit disappointed with the changes that have been made. The racing is now legal and happens on racetracks rather than city streets. It doesn't matter much though. If you like racing games, *Need for Speed: ProStreet* is just what you need.

Eddie Francis

PS3

Playing this title on the two 'big boys' in the next-gen tussle shows some alarming differences, which are likely related to the consoles rather than the game itself. In fact, the problem is more or less directly due to the development tools required by the different consoles. While the performance of the game on the Xbox 360 is fine, the PS3 version leaves a lot to be desired in terms of framerates. These framerate problems always occur at the worst possible times, adding a high level of frustration to the title. Aside from that, it's the same game. However, if you are going to play it on a next-gen console, rather opt for the MS alternative.

69
OUT OF 100

Need for Speed: Carbon

BETTER THAN

FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

WORSE THAN

BOTTOM LINE

A new, improved direction for the *Need for Speed* series.

79
OUT OF 100



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TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND

ONE OF THE FIRST things I thought when I saw *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground* in the bundle of games that I had to review was, "Another one!" Activision releases *Tony Hawk* games faster than some people buy new shoes. After having reviewed *American Wasteland* a while back, I was highly disappointed about where the series was headed (although many good things were said about *Project 8*). Fortunately, *Proving Ground* quickly restored my love for the series. In fact, playing through it, I was reminded of what made the series great to begin with and why the *Tony Hawk* series is the greatest skating series available.

The game is a lot like *THPS2*, which was by far the best in the series. It features near-perfect control schemes and good-looking maps and graphics. The new features (such as 'Nail the Trick') are absolutely spectacular to use and allow the player to enter a slow-mode version with the camera zoomed right up to the board to allow for better control of the trick. A simple flick of the analogue sticks in different directions causes your skater to try to perform a movement in that direction; but without the correct timing and placement on the board, it might just land up being a wipeout.

The game is non-linear, with three different progression paths that a player can follow. These are Hardcore, Career and

Rigger, and each has its own special abilities. Hardcore sees the player doing extreme stunts, which get wilder and wilder as the story progresses, while Career allows the player to try more complex tricks and show them off to the crowds. Perhaps the most ingenious of the lot must be Rigger. This path actually allows the player to set up his or her own tricks by placing items on the course, allowing for the construction of the perfect trick. As the player progresses, more items become available.

There's also the new Skate Lounge, which allows the player to build their very own skating parks using the rigger controls. These parks can also be taken online and shared with friends, adding a new level of realism to the franchise. Along with the Skate Lounge, there are three locations, each with its own sub-locations and so forth. These are Washington, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Each of these locations comes with new sets of ledges for grinding, ramps for big air tricks and 'half pipes'.

THPG also allows for the filming of tricks that the player performs. Players can use the new video editor to create a unique but awesome skating movie. If you're looking for a good skating game, *THPG* is it and features all the original awesomeness from the series as well as a lot extra. So long *skate*, and welcome back *Tony Hawk*! We missed you dearly.

NAG
Justin Slabbert



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

BETTER THAN

skate.

AS GOOD AS

BOTTOM LINE

Hawk is back to prove why he's the best.

87
OUT OF 100

KODES

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IT'S NOT A CITY SIMULATOR

It's a social engineering simulator. So, out with the tax advisor, ordinance ledger, and sewage network, and in with stuff to keep your sims happy and hard-working - or obedient Party members with no thought of insurrectionist rumbling, if you're angling for an Orwellian dystopia.

Sims have moods, ranging from ecstatic to furious, and sims who are seeing red are likely to wreak a similarly colourful spectrum of chaos through your city streets, potentially bringing your economy to a startled standstill. You can prevent this sort of thing altogether by providing nice things for your sims, or you can simply call in the riot squad and fix it with hurtsticks.

AN EVERGREEN SIMCITY

Since the very first *SimCity* appeared in 1989, the series has sold over 18 million copies, creating a huge fan base in the process. However, in June 2007, it was announced that Maxis, the developer behind all the other titles, would not be developing the next *SimCity* game. It was handed to Tilted Mill Entertainment to create the seventh game in the series, *SimCity Societies*. Since then, threads such as "You killed *SimCity*" have appeared on their forums, fuelled by fans unhappy with the new direction of the franchise.

In the development of *SimCity Societies*, Tilted Mill Entertainment collaborated with BP in an attempt to incorporate environmental awareness in the game. The game emulates the effects of global warming and pollution - including smog and natural disasters that are linked to this phenomenon - and illustrates the trade-off between cost, power output, and pollution. Unsurprisingly, BP's logo is only attached to the solar farms, wind farms, and natural gas plants available in the game as an alternative power source.

AND JUST WHEN IT'S ALL WORKING...

Kill it with fire. One traditional *SimCity* feature that did wriggle its way into this game is the beloved disaster console. There's an earthquake, a killer storm, and - our personal favourite - a devastating meteor shower for your vengeful delight. Remember, unpredictability is the *joie de vivre* and there's really nothing like a spot of casual pandemonium in the morning.

SIMCITY: SOCIETIES

SIMCITY: SOCIETIES HAS HIT town, and it's all bold and shiny and new - and wholly unlike any *SimCity* that has come before. This time around, instead of juggling mass transit systems and bus stations that refuse to operate efficiently (= at all), despite being on every block of the busiest thoroughfare on the entire map, it's all about creating cities with *personality*.

The core mechanism behind *SimCity*: *Societies* is the Societal Value system of which there are six: Productivity, Prosperity, Creativity, Spirituality, Authority, and Knowledge. Providing a sort of basic input/output framework, every building you place will produce or consume a number of these values, according to a relatively intuitive scheme. A Mission, for example, generates 15 Spirituality while a Propaganda Ministry produces 34 Authority. A Research Clinic, on the other hand, exhausts 5 Knowledge, and a Comedy Club knocks off 4 Creativity because it's probably full of jaded, burnt-out cynics who've forgotten how to laugh. Some buildings will both generate and consume values.

Determining the overall character of your city means carefully considering the values it produces and consumes. A well-balanced city will likely feature equal representation of all values, while building an abundance of laboratories, software developers and karaoke bars will swiftly turn your city into a teeming cyberpunk metropolis straight out of a Richard Morgan novel. Only about 15% of the game's total structures are available at the outset of the game, with the remainder doled out as you meet certain criteria, including population and Societal Value target figures. Place surveillance boxes on every street corner, and you'll have your very own Ministry of Thought in no time.

While *SimCity Societies* is likely to bore hardcore management junkies, *The Sims* crowd will probably relish the social engineering angle - although altogether it's really not half bad if you can tug your elitist "It's not a real *SimCity* game" head out of your posterior long enough to admit it. **NAG**

Tarryn "My Orwellian dystopia, my rules" van der Byl

Previous *SimCity* titles

DIFFERENT THAN



The Sims

KINDA LIKE



BOTTOM LINE

Ultimately more of a droll time waster than a truly compelling gaming experience.

70
OUT OF 100





Executioner rivalry gone bad...



DEAD HEAD FRED

IMAGINE WAKING UP in a lab faced by a mad scientist. You're told that something terrible has happened to you (a local mobster found your private investigations inconvenient and took terminal measures), but this crazy doctor has saved your life. Well, sort of... you're still technically dead, but at least you're up and about. Oh yes, there's the small matter of your head now being a jarred brain with eyeballs, as the abovementioned mobster claimed the rest of the original as a trophy. If you want to find your lost head, you'll have to go up against him. On the bright side, at least the job this mad doc has done on you has left you with the ability to 'put on' the heads of defeated enemies, with different heads conferring different skills and abilities on you.

Let's be perfectly clear about one thing: this game is intended for mature audiences. The subject matter is somewhat gruesome, though it's somewhat abstracted and as such isn't explicit. The language used in the dialogue, however, is. While unsuitable for minors, the uninhibited dialogue makes for great laughs – the game is pervaded throughout with a grim sort of gallows humour and twisted irony.

Dead Head Fred has a strong cinematic feel and the story plays an important role in the game. It's quite impressive what the developers have achieved with the graphics, although we have one criticism for developers in general: the PSP performs poorly in anything more than relatively bright ambient light, and all too often game developers forget this, making use of dark palettes. Now, while

these can be very atmospheric and suited to a game's theme and feel, they often make the games all but unplayable outdoors during the day. Such is the case with this game, which by its very nature portrays a dark and seedy environment. The music suits the mood, with a brooding, eerie and somewhat tense soundtrack playing in the background, replaced with a faster, more tense tempo when the action heats up.

Besides a bit of rudimentary puzzle solving, much of the game involves bashing the bad guys (though there are some surprises along the way). The fighting makes use of a rudimentary combo-based system, mostly comprised of punches and topped off with finisher moves. Nothing too fancy here, so no steep learning curve (i.e. you don't need to be a fighting game expert to play this).

As indicated above, you will be able to change heads during the course of the game. Here we suspend disbelief for a while as we note that Fred apparently keeps these multiple heads in his back pocket. This is not important. What is significant is that different heads confer different bonuses: one, for example, grants you increased strength, but at the cost of speed. Specific heads are also sometimes required for accessing specific locations or for executing specific tasks.

Overall, *Dead Head Fred* is one of the most original and refreshing game ideas in quite some time. *Dead Head Fred* manages to deliver a gritty package heavily laced with side-splitting, if grim, humour. Add to this great scene-setting, both visually and

aurally, hilarious yet disturbing character caricatures, and accessible ease of play, and you have a highly recommended title.

If you play this game, be sure to check out the credits – ideally after you've completed it (more laughs await!). **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Being decapitated



Gallows humour



BETTER THAN

FOR FANS OF

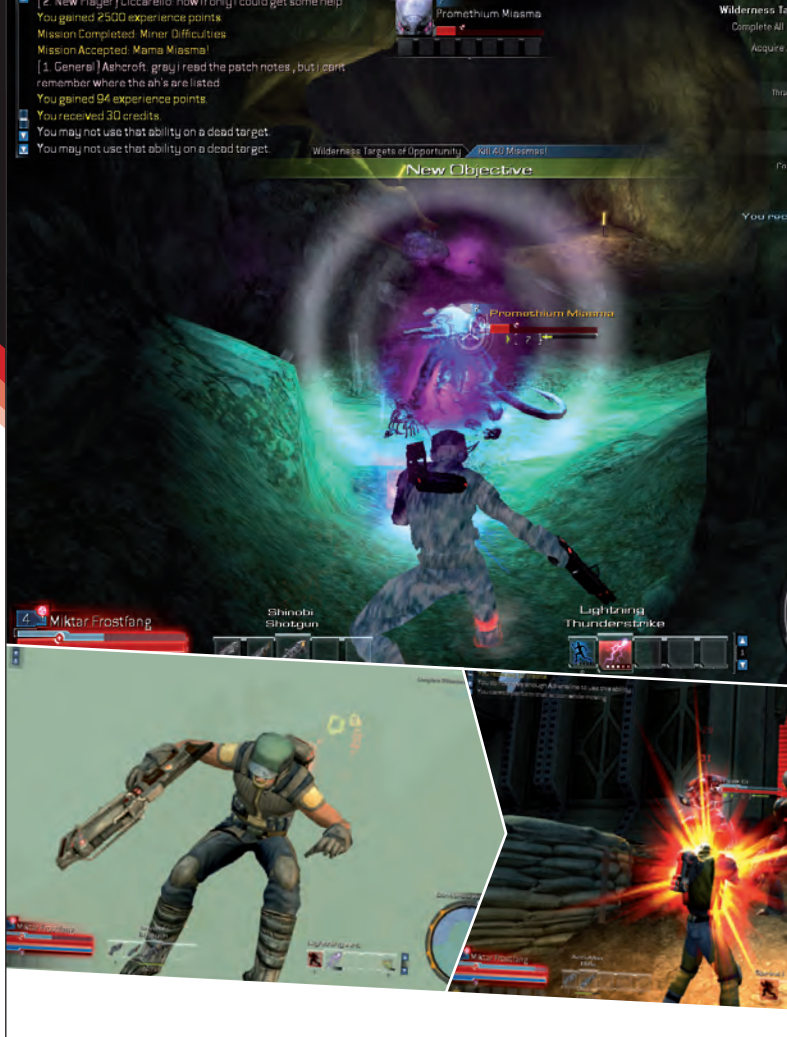


BOTTOM LINE

A fantastic story to while away some hours with. Adults only!

83
OUT OF 100





RICHARD GARRIOTT'S TABULA RASA

TABULA RASA COSTS ROUGHLY R131 a month in subscriber fees. Its installation takes up 3.71GB of hard drive space and will require (as of writing) in excess of 500MB of patches before you can play. The game requires at least 4MB ADSL and even then it suffers from lag.

We've looked at *Tabula Rasa* rather extensively: an eight-page feature that included a personal interview with Richard Garriott (pg. 76, September 2007), as well as two opinion pieces based on Beta participation (pg. 136, September 2007). Refer to those if you're looking for details on the actual game mechanics.

There was, in all honesty, a lot riding on *Tabula Rasa*. The MMO genre needs a kick in the pants. It needs a game to come along and revitalise what has essentially become a genre of pure cookie-cutter clones for the sake of not rocking the revenue-stream boat. Worse yet, most MMO titles attempt to be the next *World of Warcraft* because that's what everyone thinks constitutes a successful MMO.

Tabula Rasa was to be that game. Everything was in place: the big name of *Ultima* creator Richard Garriott, the many cool-sounding concepts borrowed from across the NCSoft stable, such as instantiated scripted missions, more visceral and immediate third-person shooter-style combat and a fresh, detailed science fiction universe for players to explore.

It is unclear where it all went wrong. The most likely suspect: *Tabula Rasa* was scrapped mid-development due to the original "East meets West" idea not working out as planned. A mad scramble ensued to try and salvage what was left. Concepts were borrowed from *Auto Assault*, *Guild Wars* etc, placed in the blender with prayers and a big name slapped on the box to help give it some street cred. The sum of its parts actually managed to end up in the negatives, because the final result is a mish-mash MMO with some cool ideas that simply don't work in cohort. The underlying structure of the game seems to suffer from trying to support too many pillars, which by themselves are good, but together cause the entire house of cards to wobble perilously. Ironically, *Auto Assault* was shut down due to poor subscriber numbers with the cause being pinned on this exact problem: it looked good on paper but lacked the proper care and attention to ensure everything balanced out. It is unclear how something with Garriott's name prefixed to it could suffer from the same problem, but here it is.

As with all reviews that are opinion, there are those who will indubitably disagree with these assertions and purport to find much joy in *Tabula Rasa*. From a personal standpoint, such disagreements are entirely founded. And yet, they don't change the end result: that *Tabula Rasa* is nothing more than a generic MMO with some good ideas

that don't quite work right.

Considering the monthly fee and what you get for it, it just doesn't seem like a good deal unless you're desperate for something new. **NAG**

Miktar "Avatar" Dracon

World of Warcraft [PC]

WORSE THAN

Guild Wars [PC]

WORSE THAN

BOTTOM LINE

Perhaps if *Tabula Rasa* didn't try so hard it might have been at least a worthwhile average.

68

OUT OF 100

Why would anyone with a big dragon need such a small pitchfork!



LAIR

ONE OF THE MOST heavily touted PS3 releases to date, *LAIR* is set in a medieval-style fantasy world replete with fantastic beasts such as dragons, sea serpents and flying manta rays, and tells the epic tale of a bitter conflict between two neighbouring states. The player takes on the role of Rohn, a member of Asylia's Sky Guard, its elite army of dragon riders. Most of the game is spent controlling a dragon, and this is where *LAIR*'s most radical innovations come into play. During flight, the dragon is steered exclusively by tilting the SIXAXIS controller. It does take some time to acclimatise to the unique controls, but there's actually little wrong with them. After some practice on the training levels, piloting the dragon becomes a fairly simple and surprisingly intuitive endeavour.

However, a few areas require some work on the player's part. A quick upward jolt of the controller should initiate a speedy 180-degree turn of your dragon, though apparently the game has trouble detecting this gesture. This is easily overcome when one realises that a turn can be made almost as quickly by holding the 'air brake' button while manually turning, but it's nonetheless frustrating. Another annoyance is that although one can lock onto targets by hitting either 'L1' or 'R1', it's impossible to cycle through different targets – you're stuck with whichever target the game reckons you're closest to, which can sometimes make it difficult to fulfil mission

objectives, particularly in missions with a time limit.

However, once you've got the hang of being airborne, attacking enemies becomes a simple matter. The face buttons on the controller are mapped to different attacks, which range from basic claw swipes to speedy ramming attacks and, of course, fireballs. Once you're au fait with the controls, it soon becomes apparent that *LAIR* is by all accounts a flight-combat game not unlike *Ace Combat* – albeit one that takes place on dragon back rather than in the cockpit of a fighter jet.

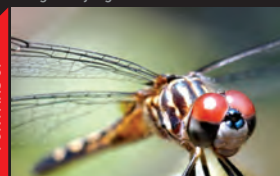
Visually, *LAIR* is indisputably stunning, with exquisite detail evident in all aspects of both the in-game visuals and the awe-inspiring cut-scenes. The game is capable of full 1080p output, and those with high-definition sets hooked up to their PS3s will experience a visual spectacle best described as jaw dropping. An appropriately sweeping score that fits perfectly with the epic scale of the game accompanies the superb graphics.

LAIR is an enjoyable experience with a unique and functional control scheme, albeit with a slight learning curve. It's not a revolutionary game, though it's an enjoyable one with breathtaking visuals and impeccable sound to boot. If you're patient and you're not expecting anything more than typical flight-combat in a fantasy setting, you won't be disappointed. (Oh, and for those who cannot handle the motion-sensitive controls, rumour

has it that plugging in a standard PC USB gamepad allows the use of more traditional controls.) **NAG**

Adam Liebman

Dragon-flying



Motion-sensing



FOR FANS OF

ALSO FOR FANS OF

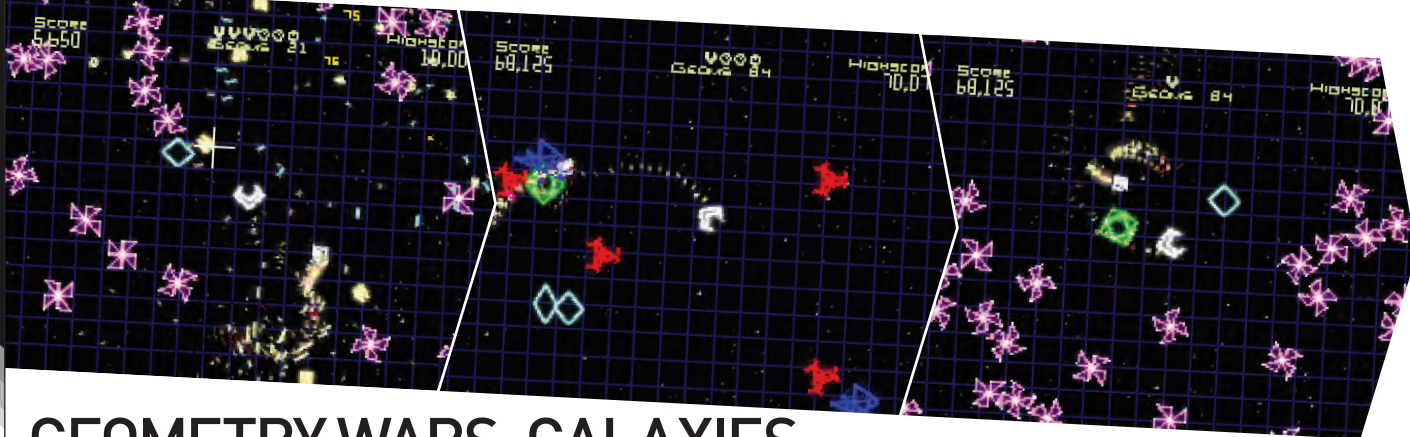


BOTTOM LINE

Enjoyable game with unique controls that won't be to everyone's liking.

74
OUT OF 100





GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

RRP→\$29 | Publisher→Vivendi Games | Distributor→NA | Genre→Action

IT SEEMS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE to cram something as beautiful as *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* onto the diminutive Nintendo DS. Somehow, the developers of *Galaxies* have done not only that, but wedged the entire *Galaxies* onto the cartridge as well.

Geometry Wars: Galaxies contains two games: *Galaxies*, and *Retro Evolved*. *Retro Evolved* mimics the Xbox LIVE Arcade title pretty much perfectly with the exception of some slowdowns during heavy enemy populations, and it lacks the cool grid-warping effect found in the XBLA version.

Galaxies is an entirely new *Geometry Wars* concept where you unlock planets inside multiple planetary systems, each planet a stage with its own nuances, shape and properties. Enemies drop Geoms that can be used to unlock more planets, planetary systems as well as new modes for the drone

that follows you around in battle. The drone can be set to any of the unlocked modes before battle. Modes include Ram, Collect, Defend, Snipe and such: very specific actions that can make or break a stage. The drone gains experience in the specific mode you use it in. The more you use it, the more effective that mode becomes.

One only has to reach Bronze to complete a stage (a certain amount of score), but progression is more about collecting Geoms than anything else. The diversity in the stages is really refreshing and often surprising.

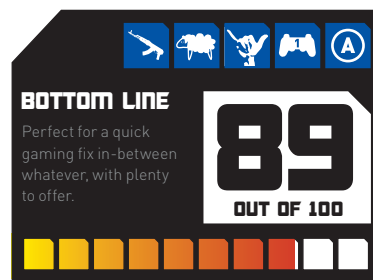
The game includes a DS Download play battle mode where two players can wirelessly compete for score, and you can send *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* to another DS for that player to play until they switch off their DS. If you hook the DS up to the Wii version of *Geometry Wars: Galaxies*, it unlocks another planetary systems: cute, but they could have



done more with the DS to Wii connectivity.

It's not perfect and often has slowdowns (which are more beneficial than a hindrance, actually), but *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* is simply the most perfect title for that quick gaming fix as each planet can be completed to satisfaction in under ten minutes. **NAG**

Miktar "Math Sucks" Dracon



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

RRP→\$34 | Publisher→Nintendo | Distributor→NA | Genre→Action/Adventure

THIS MAY BE TANTAMOUNT to going out on a limb but *Phantom Hourglass* is by far an exceptionally better *Zelda* game than *Twilight Princess* ever was. Justin certainly enjoyed *Twilight Princess* on the Wii, scoring it an expressive 92% (pg. 82, December 2007). However, he admitted that he did not consider any of the previous *Zelda* titles anything special. Such previous *Zelda* titles include *A Link to the Past*, *Minish Cap*, *Link's Awakening* as well as *Ocarina of Time*, to name but a few. To consider any of those nothing special surely borders on the imbecilic.

But I digress: *Phantom Hourglass* is the direct result of Eiji Aonuma who may possibly be the only potential successor to game design legend Shigeru Miyamoto. Aonuma had his hand in *Twilight Princess*, but the lion's share was done by Miyamoto who is starting to show his age. At the helm of *Phantom Hourglass*, Aonuma managed to create a proper sequel to *Wind Waker* as well as the best *Zelda* since *A Link to the Past*.

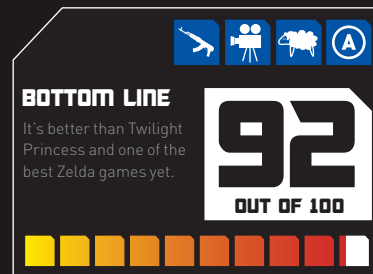
It is difficult to explain exactly what makes a good *Zelda* game with respects to the franchise, yet *Phantom Hourglass* hits all the right notes. The adventure is epic

yet whimsical: the child-like Link, hero and saviour of distressed damsels called Zelda, travels the oceans to islands that contain clues, puzzles, items, weapons or dungeons filled with twists and turns. Interacting with the world is handled via the stylus in interesting and often ingenious ways: simply being able to hand-draw notes on your map is not only useful, it actually forms the foundation of many puzzles where one must draw on the map to unveil the location of something you need.

As far as *Zelda* games go, one need to look no further than *Phantom Hourglass* for a timeless adventure that appeals to both veterans and newcomers to the series. Where *Twilight Princess* attempts to recreate the magic of *Ocarina of Time*, *Phantom Hourglass* instead attempts to bring the series back to the colourful, appealing foundations laid down in *A Link to the Past*.

It even has a one-on-one multiplayer mode that supports multi-card play and DS Download play, which involves one player acting as Link and another drawing the paths for three monsters to prevent Link from achieving his goals. **NAG**

Miktar "HEY LISTEN" Dracon



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GUILD WARS: EYE OF THE NORTH

RRP→ R189 | Publisher→ NCSoft | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ MMORPG | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

THE ONLY EXPANSION PACK to *Guild Wars*, *Eye of the North* doesn't feature new professions and instead focuses on new multi-level dungeons, new skills, armour and heroes. Intended to act as a bridge between *Guild Wars* and the upcoming *Guild Wars 2*, *Eye of the North* introduces the Norn, Asura and Sylvari, which will be playable races in the sequel. It comes as no surprise that *Eye of the North* is worth its weight in gold to those who enjoy what *Guild Wars* has to offer. There are new mini games that earn faction reputation, with Dwarven Boxing being the most amusing: you don a pair of brass knuckles and go one-on-one with an opponent, the skillbar replaced with boxing skills that have new animations.

Because *Eye of the North* is an expansion for high-level players, the dungeons and quests within are best attempted once you have

completed at least one of the three available standalone *Guild Wars* chapters. With the introduction of the Hall of Monuments, players who have completed certain objectives or chapters get to adorn a personal space with trophies, banisters and weapons that will form part of the migratory items for *Guild Wars 2*: new characters in *GW2* will receive certain bonuses based on what is displayed in the Hall of Monuments.

While perhaps not as diverse or rich as the content in the three chapters of *Guild Wars*, the missions in *Eye of the North* are certainly the most intense and really push the structure laid down in the previous chapters. Certain missions literally have you fighting armies of Charr and other minions, above and beyond what can be encountered in other chapters. Simply put: *Eye of the North* is a must-have for



Guild Wars players and since it requires that you own at least one chapter, you cannot play *Eye of the North* as a standalone. ArenaNet has proven that they know what they're doing. There's no doubt about it. **NAG**

Miktar "Charrbait" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE

If you own any of the *Guild Wars* chapters, you'll want *Eye of the North* for the additional skills and interesting missions.

90
OUT OF 100

10 colored squares (9 yellow, 1 red)



FLIGHT SIMULATOR X ACCELERATION EXPANSION PACK

RRP→ R295 | Publisher→ Microsoft Game Studios | Distributor→ Comstec | Genre→ Flight sim | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

IT'S BEEN EAGERLY AWAITED by flight-sim nutters the world over. It's hard to ignore, even by those who despise the genre, but Microsoft's *Flight Simulator X Acceleration Expansion Pack* is the first expansion pack for the evergreen *Flight Simulator* series. Never before have the 'suits' at ACES Studio in Redmond given the flight-simulation community an expansion to the game that created so many flight-sim widows. We at NAG can hear the cries of thanks. Their minds should be preserved for future generations before we all become self-absorbed, screw up the world, kill all the whales and deplete the world's supply of hemp.

Packaged on DVD and shipped in a DVD case with art closely resembling the

FSX cover, there can be no mistaking its lineage. The Acceleration pack requires *FSX* Standard or Deluxe to be installed and activated. It also needs SP1. If you don't already have this installed, the expansion will install it for you.

In addition to three new aircraft – the F18 Hornet, race-modified P-51D Mustang and AgustaWestland EH101 helicopter – the multiplayer mode has been enhanced with 19 new online missions and 20 new, very challenging single-player missions. A strong focus on the Reno Air Race series adds a competitive edge to Microsoft's *Flight Simulator X*.

A military element makes its first appearance in *FS* with aircraft carrier operations, patrols above Cape Canaveral

before a space shuttle launch and SAR (Search And Rescue) operations, including a rhino rescue from poachers in KwaZulu-Natal. **NAG**

Sean James

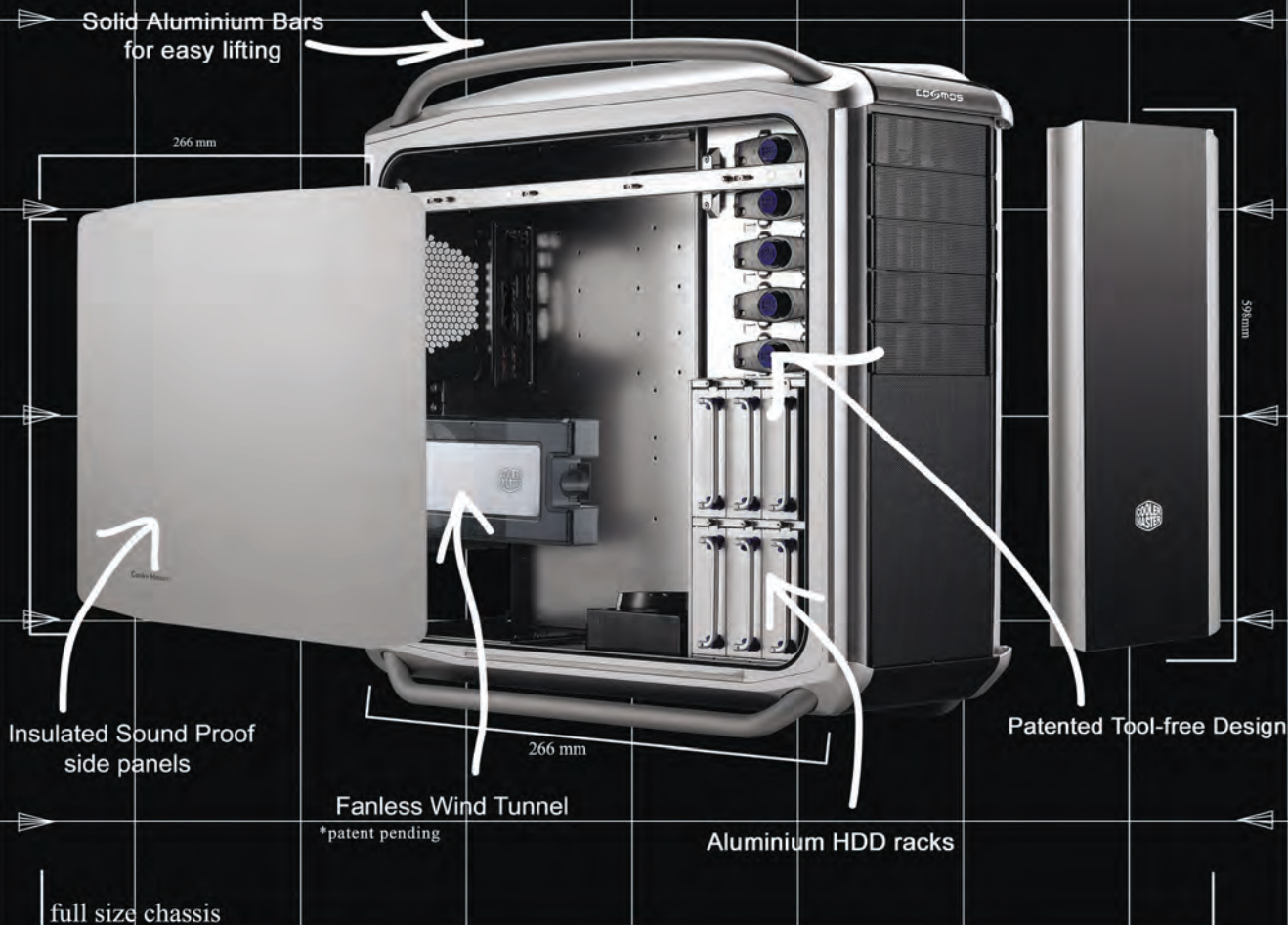
BOTTOM LINE

With this expansion pack, the simulation plays even better and is a must for flight-sim fans.

80
OUT OF 100

10 colored squares (8 yellow, 2 red)

Performance Concealed in Silence



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Specification	
Materials	Chassis: Steel, Aluminum
Expansion Slots	7
5.25" Drive Bay	5 exposed
3.5" Drive Bay	6 (Hidden)
Motherboard	Extend ATX, ATX
Weight	37.2 lbs
Dimension W/H/D	10x23x24
Fans	4 included



RC-1000

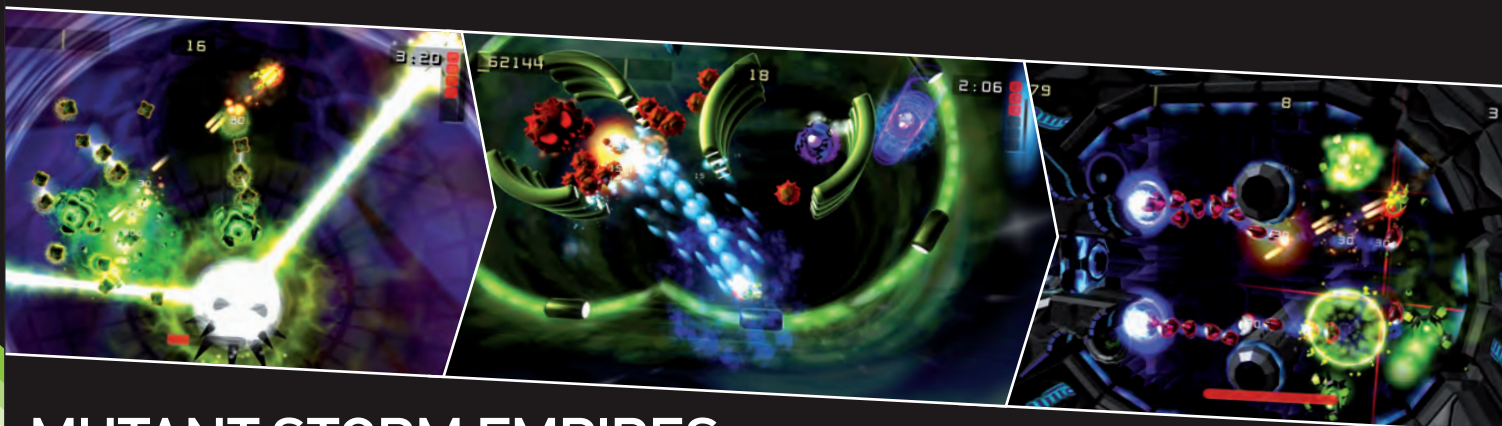
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MUTANT STORM EMPIRES

RRP→ 800 points | Publisher→ Microsoft Game Studios | Distributor→ Xbox LIVE Arcade | Genre→ Action

IF YOU MISSED *Mutant Storm Reloaded*, it's a decent enough dual-analogue shooter like *Geometry Wars*. Each stage is a single room where enemies spawn in increasingly difficult patterns and you can team up with a buddy to help sooth the burn. *Reloaded* has a very specific charm and challenge thanks to some rather disconcertingly beautiful visuals and extremely difficult stages.

Empires is nothing like *Reloaded* and one has to wonder why they decided to mess with a perfectly good formula. The biggest difference between *Empires* and *Reloaded* is that *Empires* is a series of connected rooms that make up a stage with each stage usually punctuated by some big boss-like enemies. The visuals in *Empires* remain oddly insipid, almost lazy. Two player cooperative makes a return but at the cost of the shot-boost bar available in single-player. The shot-boost lets you plow through enemies for a brief period

of enhanced bullet damage and spread. It makes sense to remove the shot-boost from cooperative play, considering you have double the firepower, but it leaves the action oddly flat.

This isn't to say that *Mutant Storm Empires* is a bad game. On its own merits it contains ample challenge and opportunity for fun, especially if you play with a friend. However, compared to *Mutant Storm Reloaded*, it seems a lesser game, almost better suited to being a prequel rather than a sequel. The multi-room aspect keeps things different and interesting, but at the cost of a more-focused experience. A more suspicious person would think that *Empires* is just a quick cash-in, especially considering the visuals.

You can play two-player cooperative locally or online through the four worlds and the expected leaderboards and

achievements fill out the cost of the package, but it's recommended to check out the demo first to see if it's the right cup of tea. There is promise of downloadable content for *Empires*, but nothing solid has been announced with regards to what type of content that might be. **NAG**

Miktar "GAYMEESI" Dracon



BOTTOM LINE

It just isn't as good as *Mutant Storm Reloaded*, but it's still entertaining.

68
OUT OF 100



VIVA PIÑATA: PARTY ANIMALS

RRP→ R529 | Publisher→ Microsoft
Distributor→ MiDigital | Genre→ Party

CONSIDERING HOW POPULAR IT is, it's rather surprising that there aren't more party games for the various consoles; in particular games that model themselves on the *Mario Party* games. There has been Ubisoft's flawed gem, *Rayman Raving Rabbids*, and the very underwhelming *Fuzion Frenzy* games. Now the *Viva Piñata* franchise spins off into this arena too. It's not a half-bad attempt. The good news is that as a party game, it's quite a bit of fun. An event consists out of several racing events reminiscent of kart-racing games. Winning determines your points bonus with the mini games that follow after a race. Ultimately, you want to do well in the mini games, but winning races can keep you in reach of the winning spot. It's a nice way to balance the playing field. Sadly, the game lacks all the charm of Rare's title, instead emulating the rather rotten *Viva Piñata* cartoon series. So, if you really want style, you'll be annoyed, but if you can live with a fair bit of substance, it's fun – especially with four players. At the very least, there is no better party game on the 360. To go a step up, you should consider buying a Wii. **NAG**

James Francis



BOTTOM LINE

Very flawed, but it parties where it counts.

70
OUT OF 100





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JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

RRP→ R599 | Publisher→ THQ | Distributor→ SK Games | Genre→ Racing

THE *NEED FOR SPEED* series finally has a serious competitor. *Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights* is a dream come true for car-modification fanatics around the world who cannot afford to modify their own cars. Now, players will actually get to see the mechanics behind the modification instead of just choosing modifications and applying them (not to mention that the customisations allowed are almost endless). Unfortunately, while the customisations might be terrific, the control scheme is a slight letdown compared to other titles. While it's not that bad and is easy to get used to, it does get extremely frustrating – especially in the various drift races. *Juiced 2's* graphics is also relatively average compared to the likes of other modern racing sims, but still decent enough to warrant a look. One thing is certain though: the developers at Juice Games must really have been lonely when developing the game, because on almost every menu is a

picture of a hot babe (that, or they remembered that hot babes sell games).

Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights sports a new feature called Driver DNA, which records a player's style of driving and creates a strand of 'DNA'. Other players can then download your DNA from the PlayStation Network or Xbox LIVE and race against it in the Driver DNA Lab.

The various racetracks included are pretty decent, and while other features might disappoint, the tracks make the races extremely exciting and thrilling.

Overall, *Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights* is a fairly decent racing simulation with a heavy focus on modification rather than on all-out, action-packed races. While there are times that the game loses a few frames per second due to processing, it generally runs very smoothly and looks decent all-round. It's a solid title for the racing enthusiast. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



BOTTOM LINE

Girls, cars and exotic tracks – what more does a racing game need?

70
OUT OF 100



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008

RRP→ R599 | Publisher→ Konami
Distributor→ SK Games | Genre→ Sport

KONAMI'S RESPECTED *PRO EVOLUTION Soccer* series has finally made its PlayStation 3 debut and, although failing to completely harness the power of the next-generation console, it's an enjoyable experience. The recent focus of the *PES* series has been on fast and frenetic football, and this is evident in this year's release. Fast footwork and blistering runs down half the length of the pitch are the order of the day, and though purists might be more satisfied with the slower pace of a game like *FIFA 08*, the pace of the action means that there's seldom a dull moment while playing. Players have a myriad of tricks and shooting and passing options at their disposal, provided enough time is taken to learn the controls, which include the controversial dive move – a new if relatively minor addition to the series. The controls are fairly intuitive, though on occasion players seem frustratingly determined to pass the ball in the wrong direction. Mark Lawrenson and Jon Champion provide the commentary, and it's quite passable despite occasional inappropriately timed remarks. The biggest flaw of *PES 2008* is its visuals: although the players and pitches are detailed, the game does on occasion suffer from slowdown. Moreover, the lack of a realistic crowd emphasises how far the series has yet to progress, especially on next-generation consoles. Although not perfect, *PES 2008* is an enjoyable alternative for any football enthusiast looking for something with a little more pace than the latest *FIFA* release. **NAG**

Adam Liebman



Follow the floating orb



BOTTOM LINE

Enjoyable, fast-paced, arcade-style action, let down by visuals.

72
OUT OF 100



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NINTENDO DS VERSION

Practically identical except for some reduced visuals and longer load times. There is a stylus control scheme for directly selecting units and moving them but it's actually inferior to just using the regular control scheme. DS Download Play is supported for a little one on one battle action using only one cart, but limits you to one specific level. The DS version lacks the stunning rendered cutscenes from the PSP version, but that's no great loss. The framerate suffers on occasion, more-so than the PSP version, but since it's turn-based it shouldn't matter to most people. All in all, while the PSP version is the one to have, the DS version won't leave anyone wanting.



REVIEW

Look Listen
For the Fans

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB

WARHAMMER 40,000: SQUAD COMMAND

RRP→ R445 | Publisher→ THQ | Distributor→ Ster Kinekor | Genre→ Turn-based Strategy

WHAT A SURPRISE THIS game turned out to be. What a stunning little gem of a game it turned out to be. Thanks to some rather ingenious design choices, *Squad Command* is possibly the single most accessible turn-based strategy game since the dawn of the genre. Action plays out like action: unit movement and combat use up Action Points and any unspent APs go into 'Overwatch', which means the unit with APs to spare will fire at enemies that cross its field of view even during the enemy turn. This allows you to set up effective ambushes and kill-zones: an absolute must if you're going to recreate the *Warhammer* experience. While *Squad Command* may not have the depth inherent in the tabletop version or the games that attempt to mimic it, what it does instead

is provide a focused experience- fun yet challenging.

Several interface design choices really lend themselves to helping you understand exactly what it is you're doing: when plotting unit movement, green arrows to the destination provide an indication that there will be enough APs left for Overwatch once movement is done, while red arrows indicate no combat will be possible after movement and grey arrows show you the maximum travel distance possible. It's a small thing, but when planning how to assault a heavily fortified structure, indispensable interface design such as this makes the game worth every second.

There are plenty of missions, ample multiplayer options including Game Share



and an online mode (untested as GameSpy refused to create a new account in the review period). The lack of Space Orks may annoy the puritans, but there's always hope for a sequel.

NAG

Miktar "Dakkadakkadaka" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE

In the most unlikely place, we find a worthwhile *Warhammer* game as well as the most evolved TBS.

91
OUT OF 100



WIPEOUT PULSE

RRP→ R375 | Publisher→ RedOctane | Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Music

OUR PREVIEW OF PULSE (pg. 54, December 2007) pretty much said it all, but for those who missed it: *Pulse* is pure bliss if you're a *Wipeout* fan or just a casual anti-gravity racing enthusiast. Little has changed from the preview code to the retail version: nips and tucks here and there but overall the entire game is a polished sheen from start to finish. The tracks are beautiful, lush and vibrant. The music kicks, as it always has in the *Wipeout* series. The racing itself remains unchanged from prior incarnations (the pinnacle being *Wipeout Pure* [PSP] until now), but has the welcome return of Eliminator mode which is essentially deathmatch on the track. The campaign comes in the form of many grids, each cell representing an event: complete an event and adjacent cells with more events unlock. Complete enough cells and you unlock the next grid. The new Racebox mode lets you create your own grid for singleplayer or multiplayer and the

new Photo Mode lets you take your own posed screenshots. Every screenshot in this review comes from us, actually. It's worth comparing them to the provided screenshots in the preview, just to remind yourself that publishers can't help but lie. Even though the visuals may not look that great in still, the true beauty surfaces when in motion.

Online play comes complete with rankings and clans and wireless ad hoc is as slick as one could hope for. Game Share lets you transfer a single-track, single-ship demo over for use in Single Race, Time Trial and Ad-hoc multiplayer racing. It's hard to imagine how *Pulse* could be any better, other than appearing on slightly more powerful consoles of the non-handheld variety. *Pulse* is as complete a package as it gets, even supporting custom skin designs done via the Website and a cunning Flash application.

The only hurdle to *Pulse* is the same hurdle the *Wipeout* series has carried since



conception: the game is hard. Coming to grips with even the basic racing setup takes a while and initially new players will crawl along, hitting every wall in sight. Part of the problem may well be the dubious PSP analogue 'nub' with its wide dead-zone. That aside, *Pulse* adds a much-needed beat to the serene quality established in *Pure*.

NAG
Miktar "Zone" Dracon

BOTTOM LINE

Better than *Wipeout Pure* and the best *Wipeout*, period. Go!

92
OUT OF 100



Look Listen
For the Fans

PC
PS2
PS3
PSP
XBOX
360
DS
Wii
GBA
MOB



SCRABBLE INTERACTIVE 2007 EDITION

RRP→ R199 | Publisher→ Ubisoft
Distributor→ Megarom | Genre→ Puzzle
Platforms→ PC, DS | PC Spec→ 1 2 3 4 5

WHO OF US HASN'T played *Scrabble*? The game is a classic and a household name to boot. Pretty much since computers could display the very rudimentary 'graphics' required to represent a *Scrabble* board, electronic versions of the game have been available. Just like many such 'generic' franchises, *Scrabble* is being updated from time to time – hence 2007 Edition. Unfortunately, this seems to be a very superficial polishing up. After all, the official dictionary has remained largely unchanged, and even the game's aesthetics are nothing to write home about. Visually, it's as plain and bland as you can imagine, though, at least, this means that frills don't distract the player. A small number of visual themes can be selected. *Scrabble* doesn't feature a soundtrack as such but sounds effects (we don't exactly know what birds' tweeting have to do with a word game). While the display is very plain, it nevertheless provides many information windows that can be opened and dragged around as desired. However, the fact that a game of this nature cannot be Alt+Tabbed is quite a serious flaw.

Nevertheless, aside from the aesthetic elements, the game delivers what it sets out to: a functional version of *Scrabble*, taking [rudimentary] advantage of the capabilities of a PC. Where the game truly shines is its comprehensive tutorial and training modes, teaching players top strategies and the like. This title's other main strength lies in its online matchmaking capabilities. Ubisoft maintains a server that handles competitive play, complete with ladders and rankings. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin



zzz **BOTTOM LINE**
Scrabble fans will love this, while other players will fall asleep.

B 3

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA EXTREME

RRP→ 800 MS Points | Publisher→ Q Entertainment
Distributor→ Xbox LIVE Arcade | Genre→ Action
Platforms→ 360

"PERCUSSIVE" IS PERHAPS THE best word to describe *E4*, the expanded version of the 2004 freeware title *Every Extend* (which also saw a lustreless PSP release in the form of *Every Extend Extra*). The game is simple: you control a ship which you can detonate whenever, causing a circular explosion that ripples outwards. Enemies that touch the explosion radius will in turn themselves explode, causing a chain-reaction.

Each explosion is punctuated by a percussive beat that manages to keep primal time to the music. More and more enemies rock up (sometimes literally as the game ties music and gameplay together into something rather synesthetic), dropping power-ups that increase enemy speed (as well as the BPM), add time or give you a temporary shield. Touch an enemy or get shot down and the game resets to its original speed and bonus multiplier, which really ruins your chi. A kind of beat-based swing-bar fills and empties as you play. Detonating at just the right moment when the bar is full increases your score multiplier and adds to the overall challenge.

To be honest, *E4* will look like nothing more than an experimental trippy, trancy concept to most people (especially people with no sense of rhythm). Music-centric game lovers will enjoy being able to generate levels based on their own music stored on the 360; the competitive types can duke it out mano-a-mano in a score battle mode. There is a regular shoot-em-up mode if you're not in the mood to time your blasts to funky feat. **NAG**

Miktar "BeatBox" Dracon



BOTTOM LINE

It's niche and aimed at people who like a little rhythm in their games.

87
OUT OF 100



SUPER STARDUST HD

RRP→ R75 | Publisher→ SCEA
Distributor→ PlayStation Network | Genre→ Action
Platforms→ PS3

IT MAY LOOK LIKE yet another *Asteroids* clone on the surface, but *Super Stardust HD* actually manages to define itself clearly with some very intelligent design and über-lush visuals. It may even go without saying that what *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* did for Xbox LIVE Arcade, *Super Stardust HD* does for the PlayStation Network.

What makes *Stardust* interesting is the spherical stage, set around a planet being assaulted by meteors and asteroids, along with various other extraterrestrial bric-a-brac. Your ship has three types of shots, each one very specific and different, as well as a bomb and boost that lets you tunnel through large groups of enemies (or for fun, the bigger meteors – it actually leaves a hole through the meteor).

The increasingly difficult stages and planets provide ample challenge while the two-player cooperative mode has an interesting kick: the closer the players are to each other, the more improved their weapons become. Each of the three types of shot can be upgraded with power-ups and knowing when to use which weapon forms part of what makes *Stardust* such a refreshing change.

PlayStation 3 owners actually have a game on their hands that Xbox 360 owners can be envious about, truth be told. Worth every penny, *Stardust* is about as fine a dual-analogue shooter romp as you can get. **NAG**

Miktar "Mo Dean" Dracon



BOTTOM LINE

Tons of fun, looks great and won't kill your wallet. What more do you want?

90
OUT OF 100



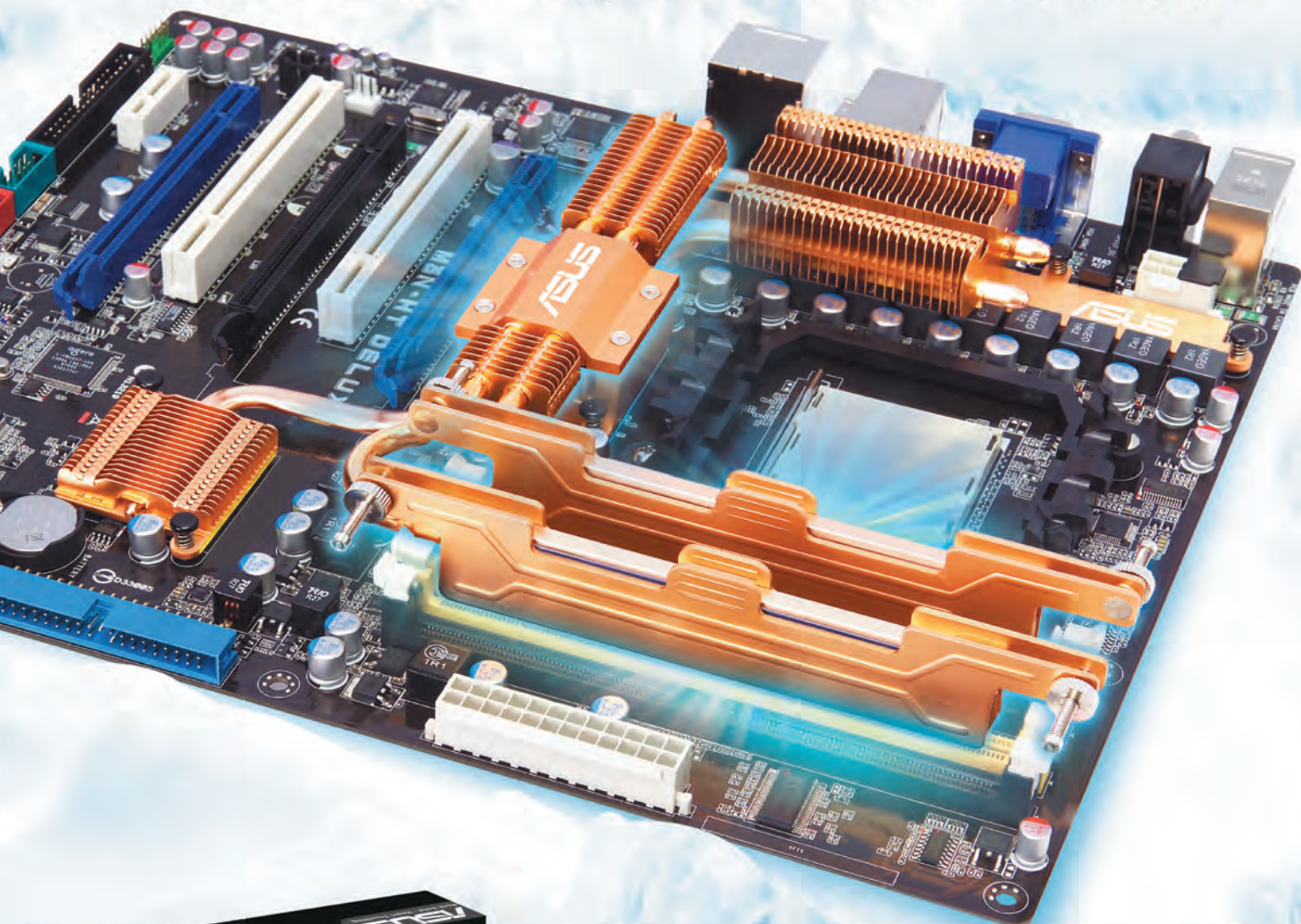
BOTTOM LINE
Tons of fun, looks great and won't kill your wallet. What more do you want?

90 **B** 3

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With the exclusive Cool Mempipe Technology, the new ASUS M3N-HT Deluxe/Mempipe motherboard provides up to 10°C cooler for extreme memory performance. Being separate from the general heat pipe is the key here, and results in non-interference between the two different heat balance systems for more efficient memory cooling.

This AMD's AM2+ / AM2 CPU supported motherboard provides bus speeds of up to 5200 MT/s and supports DDR2 1066/800/533 memory. The M3N-HT Deluxe/Mempipe also features the latest 3-Way SLI and Hybrid SLI graphics technologies for astounding graphics performance, and user friendly features such as the ASUS Express Gate for rapid access to the Internet in 5 seconds without the need to enter Windows or read from the hard disk.

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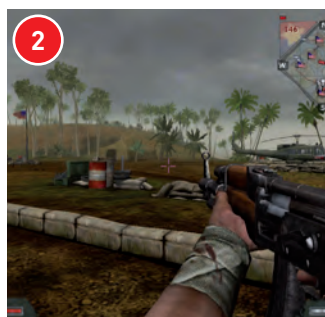
FEBRUARY EDITION

NAME THE GAME AND WIN! It's so easy, we even provide the little lines for you to write on. You don't need to know them all to stand a chance of winning, just e-mail in what you have and try your luck! E-mail your answers to nagcomps@tidemedia.co.za, subject line "NAME THAT GAME FEBRUARY" and be sure to include your full name, phone number and postal address in the mail or we can't send you your prize! Ooops: There was a print mistake that resulted in the December Name That Game running once more in January. Sorry about that folks.

Congratulations to our November winner, Carel van Heerden, who won himself a copy of *Assassin's Creed* for Xbox 360!
Congratulations as well to our December/January winner, Coburt Jordaan, who won himself a copy of *Haze* for PS3!



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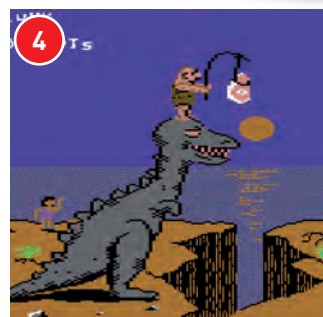


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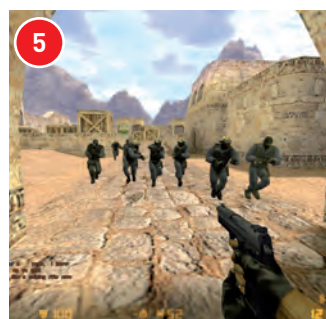


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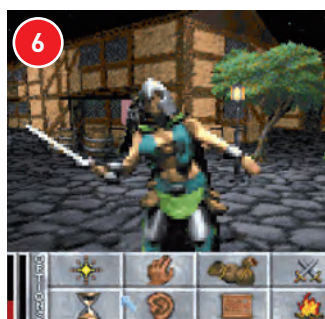


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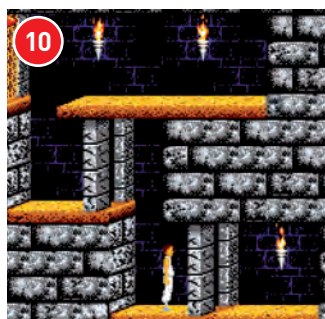


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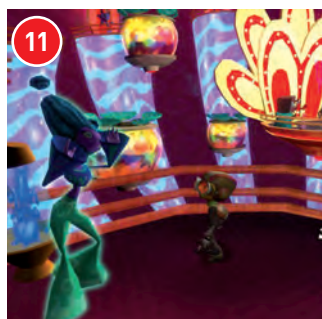
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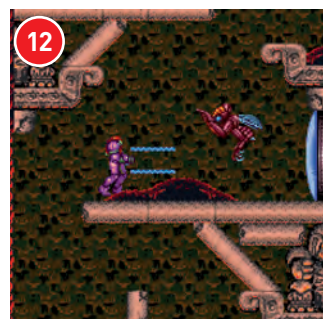
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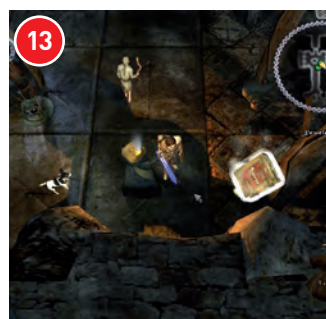
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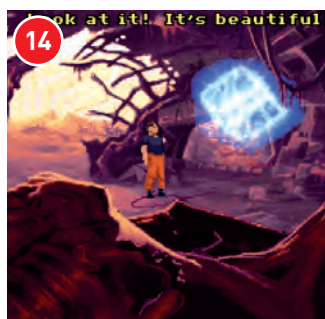
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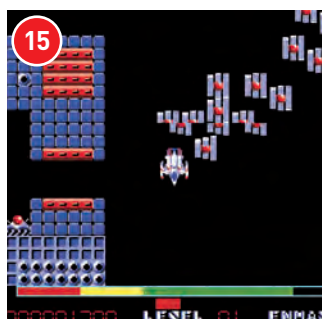


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LAST MONTH'S GAMES: 1. Anachronox; 2. Call of Duty 4; 3. Daikatana; 4. Dark Reign; 5. Deus Ex; 6. Guild Wars; 7. Krush Kill N Destroy; 8. Painkiller; 9. Portal; 10. skate; 11. Soul Calibur 4; 12. Stranglehold; 13. Super Mario Galaxy; 14. The Witcher; 15. Unreal Tournament III; 16. World in Conflict

NAG

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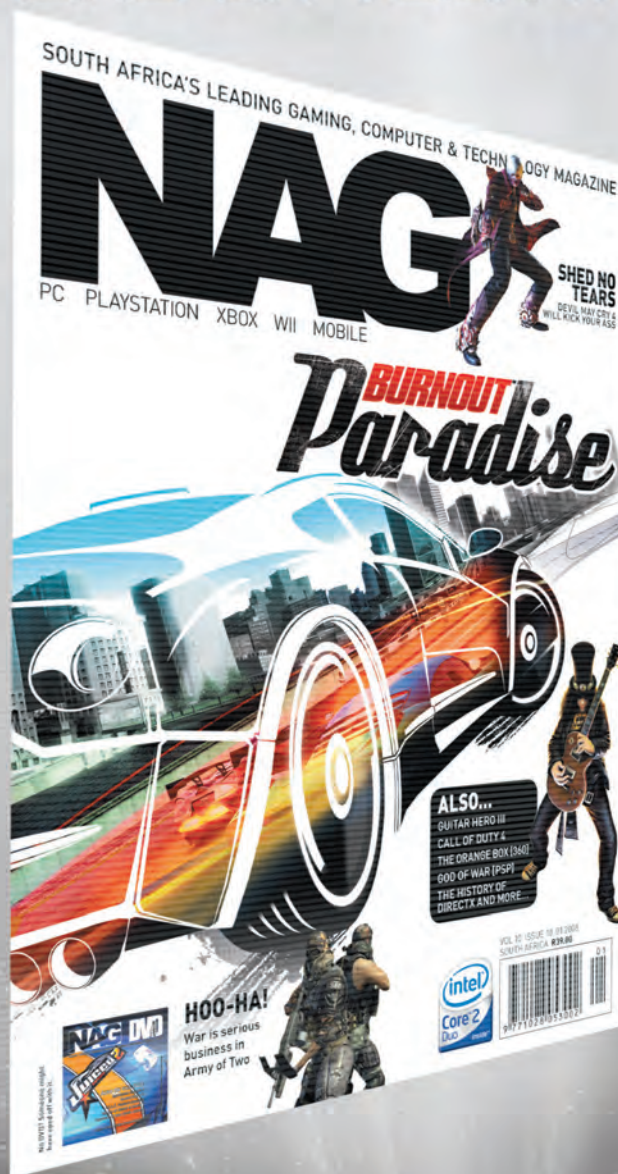
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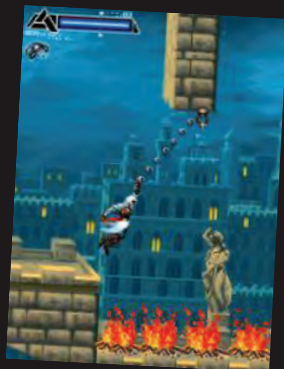
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ASSASSIN'S CREED

Publisher→ Gameloft | Genre→ Action | Reviewed on→ Nokia N81 | Rating→ 90
Download→ SMS NAGAC to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

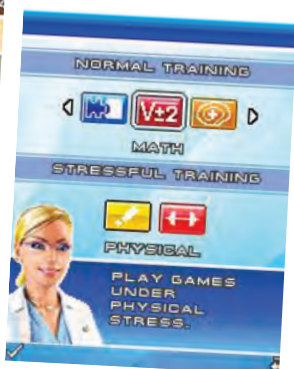
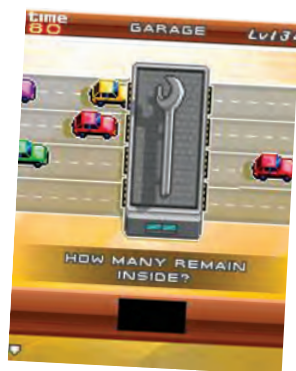
IF THERE IS ONE area where you can't deny Gameloft's superiority, it's with these side-scrolling type games. Lush and detailed sprite art is just the icing on a cake made from solid gameplay, good design and a very tolerable control scheme. Not that it's rocket science: the system has been refined through numerous games, in particular the *Splinter Cell* games. But nonetheless *Assassin's Creed* represents a high entry into the whole business – a sleek, polished and highly playable platformer.

Naturally, the game isn't going to take the same free-roaming approach as the console game, but it follows the same plot. You have to control Altair through a series of levels. At the end of each he meets the boss (usually his target). The controls make his movements very simple to control and Altair can scale walls, stop falls and kill enemies with the greatest of ease (though, ideally, you want to have a phone with a thumbstick). Occasionally a top-down section will break the pattern. One annoyance is that to run



and then jump is tricky, often sending you into spikes below. But that's a limitation that depends on which handset you use. From a gaming point of view this is really fine.

NAG
James Francis



BRAIN CHALLENGE 2

Publisher→ Gameloft | Genre→ Puzzle
Reviewed on→ Nokia N81 | Rating→ 81
Download→ SMS NAGBC2 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

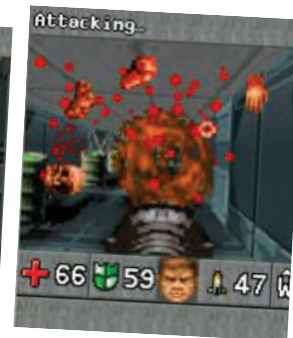
PEOPLE OFTEN ACCUSE GAMING of being a mindless pursuit, but we gamers know better than that. If they persist, however, get them to try *Brain Challenge 2*. Although it doesn't feel like a particularly challenging game, *Brain Challenge 2* requires more thought than the average mobile title. This is especially true of the new "stress relief" section, which is comprised of a number of remarkably complicated mini games.

One thing that this title has in spades is variation. It will keep you challenged for a good long while, with a variety of brain-stimulating (and teasing) puzzles to work through in the main section of the game. New "exercises" are also unlocked as you progress through the game.

Of course, the validity of the ongoing progress reports and such can be questioned, but the game is certainly fun and unquestionably mentally stimulating. It's not the most original of games – there are a lot of brain testers out there – but it holds its own, and provides appeal through enticing games, clear graphics and easy controls. It's a fantastic game for a quick distraction, and has the added advantage of being a bit more stimulating than your average title.

NAG

Walt Pretorius



DOOM RPG

Publisher→ THQ Wireless | Genre→ Action
Reviewed on→ Nokia N81 | Rating→ 95
Download→ SMS NAGDOOM to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

DOOM THE RPG? WHAT a thought. There are very few games that would really qualify less for any kind of role-playing element. Pac-Man, for example. But in reality, this is not quite what it seems. While *Doom RPG* has elements of stat systems and such in it. The real reason is to employ a turn-based combat system. Wait, that might sound terrible, but hear me out. It works very well. Each action – moving, shooting, healing, dodging – in *Doom RPG* requires an action point. The same goes for the monsters. Because playing an FPS on a mobile in real time would be a huge pain in the ass, splitting it into turns makes things easier to digest. The trick is that you can do your moves as slow or as fast as you please, so if your reactions are quick and your plan clear, it plays just like the real deal. So it's not really turn-based as much as real time – but you can stop and think whenever you want to. There is a stat system and you can buy extra vitality and accuracy for your *Doom* guy. But you gain these anyway just by shooting demons. *Doom RPG* is a clever answer to FPS games on mobile phones. We should all want to see more of this.

NAG

James Francis

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REVIEWS

SIMCITY: SOCIETIES

Publisher→ EA MOBILE | Genre→ Management | Reviewed on→ Nokia N81 | Rating→ 85
Download→ SMS NAGSCS to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

IT'S BECOMING VERY COMMON to see PC and other gaming titles making some form of an appearance on the mobile platform. But, quite often, the games are pale shadows of themselves. This is not the case with *SimCity Societies*, though... here is a title that is as at home on a phone as it is on a PC.

The premise is exactly the same as it is in the more casual city builder on PC; build a city, supply its needs and keep the citizens happy. To this end the player can build residential buildings, work locations and venues (which are basically entertainment efforts). Various support structures and decorations can also be built.

The game is laughably simple to get into, but the scenario-based gameplay can lead to quite a complex experience. Balancing the city perfectly can be as challenging on this smaller screen as it

is on PC. A bit of criticism comes from the fact that the financial system pretty much ensures that you always have a steady supply of income, lessening the challenge somewhat.



On the whole, though, you cannot go wrong downloading and playing this game. It is well presented, easy to control and great fun to play. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



URBAN ATTACK

Publisher→ Vivendi Games Mobile | Genre→ Action
Reviewed on→ Nokia N81 | Rating→ 80
Download→ SMS NAGUA to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

HERE WE HAVE A game that surpasses any expectations we may have had of a mobile game. To date, the most impressive games on this platform have tended to be sports titles, but what we have here is a very accomplished shooter, and it is just over a mere megabyte in size! *Urban Attack* boasts a very impressive story that deals with the eruption of a new Cold War. In the Eastern Bloc, the Red Mafia takes power and threatens the Western world. Interestingly enough, the player assumes the role of a cyborg agent working for the Red Mafia – so, essentially, you get to play the 'bad guys'. The bulk of the action takes place in the first person, which means that you actually view the world in 3D. This is quite taxing on a mobile phone's hardware, so the graphics is vector-based, with colour used sparingly on important objects. The first-person shooting action is interspersed with a variety of mini-games, which all contribute to the overall plot in some way, (such as breaking codes and reviving Yuri the cyborg). During the course of the game, you will use numerous weapons, and they are all sufficiently different to make for a varied experience. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



WORMS 2007

Publisher→ THQ Wireless | Genre→ Action-puzzle
Reviewed on→ Nokia N81 | Rating→ 70
Download→ SMS NAGW07 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

THERE AREN'T MANY PEOPLE who are unfamiliar with the *Worms* games. They originally came out on PC many winters ago, and given how mobile processing technology is advancing, it is completely unsurprising that they have been making appearances on cellphones for some time now. This latest version offers enhancements over previous mobile versions, and is essentially on a par with the original PC titles. This means that it is now possible to pan across the map, and the full spectrum of weapon and action options is now available. Also, it is possible to play with several (up to three) friends in a "pass the handset" mode that is much like the hot-seat mode of the original. The controls are simple to use. There are also several other play modes, including a couple of single-player modes. The graphics are suited to a handset's small screen and in 2D, just like in the original. The in-game movement feels slightly sluggish. This might not be a performance issue, but rather an intentional design. The game is very small with the download weighing in at just under a quarter-meg. **NAG**

James Francis

THE BEST MOBILE GAMES OF 2007

SMALLER, BETTER, FASTER, STRONGER... MOBILE GAMES HAD A BUMPER YEAR IN 2007 WITH SOME TRULY STELLAR TITLES. WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE BEST MOBILE GAMES OF 2007, SQUINTING A LITTLE BECAUSE OUR CELLPHONES ARE SMALL.

WORLD SERIES OF POKER: PRO CHALLENGE

Developer: Glu Mobile

Publisher: Glu Mobile

It ain't the 'six players round a table' setup, focusing on face-to-face duels instead, but it's as slick as a Royal Flush. It has a Tilt meter which fills up as you win hands, forcing your opponent to play like a dumb-ass when the bar is full. The career mode has ample depth and the AI is a sneaky bugger, providing more than enough challenge.

TOWNSMEN 4

Developer: HandyGames

Publisher: HandyGames

There are practically no strategy games on mobile, but *Townsmen 4* does the trick. You build a town like in *Settlers* or *Civilization*, completing missions, balancing resources and generally taxing your noodle. The stylised isometric graphics is a joy.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE MISSIONS

Developer: Capcom

Publisher: Capcom

It needs a 3D-capable handset but it's worth it. You play Jill Valentine through objective-based missions, most of which involve harassing the undead. Each level only lasts a few minutes, perfect for pick-up-and-play on the go. Controls need work, but they're not terrible.

PLAYMAN EXTREME RUNNING

Developer: Mr. Goodliving

Publisher: RealArcade

Easily the best thing to hit cellphones since predictive Text, you pakour your way across a selection of city locations, collecting flags and laying down the smack on rivals. Controls are simple, animation is fluid and the levels unlock with carefully crafted precision.

CHUZZLE MOBILE

Developer: PopCap Games

Publisher: PopCap Games

If you don't know PopCap, you don't know mobile gaming. *Chuzzle* involves sliding rows and columns of little furry balls until you match three or more (like E.T. the Extra Testicle), scoring combos. It's addictive stuff and great for attacks of boredom.

PYRAMID BLOXX

Developer: Digital Chocolate

Publisher: Digital Chocolate

One-button gameplay really works for *Pyramid Bloxx*, as you chuck stones from worker to worker using the number '5' key. The better you time your button presses, the better your pyramid. Monkeys and donkeys help (comically), letting you enjoy the finely tuned scoring system.

ALL NAG MOBILE REVIEWS ARE DONE ON THE NOKIA N81

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The Last Starfighter

SAVING THE UNIVERSE ONE GAME AT A TIME

IN 1984, KIDS STREAMED to cinemas for a movie about a dream: the dream that if you are super-brilliant at a game, one day someone will notice and you'll be rewarded for that. Sure, that happened years later, mostly in South Korea, but back in the Eighties ambitions were much higher. To the outer galaxy, to be specific. This is what happened to Alex Rogan, a high-school graduate who would love a way out of his trailer-park existence. In the meantime he plays *Starfighter*, an arcade cabinet at the local shop. One night he breaks the record and the game's creator, Centauri, arrives to make him a deal. The game is really an elaborate testing machine to pick the best starfighter. Alex is offered to join the Star League and defend the known universe against the evil Xur and his Ko-Dan Armada.

Alex chickens out and the Ko-Dan manages to destroy the Star League base. Centauri convinces Alex to return and he gears up with alien pal Grig to take a lone modified ship and destroy the Ko-Dan fleet (ultimately employing the Death Blossom, a special weapon that best resembles a disco ball with lasers). It's the perfect game setup - a single fighter takes on an army and wins. In a way, it was the perfect gaming movie.

The Last Starfighter is notable for at least one other aspect: it was one of the first (some say the first) to use computer-generated graphics instead of physical models for its major special effects scenes. Apart from explosions and the odd prop and sets, special effects scenes were rendered on a Cray X-MP supercomputer. In total, 27 minutes of effects were created for the film, which has 300 special effects scenes, cutting special effects

costs by at least a third.

Unfortunately, while the *Tron* meets *Star Wars* movie pulled in younger audiences, it wasn't a major success and a sequel never appeared. Everyone expected it would do better though. While an official game remained absent (see box out), a book based on the movie as well as a three-issue Marvel miniseries was released for it. Still, it had a major cultural impact on anyone who had a bit of interest in games, spawning several pseudo games, frequent hip-hop references and even a musical in 2004. **NAG**



A GAME MOVIE WITHOUT A GAME

While it's not the norm that a movie about a game has a game spin-off (perhaps a good thing, given movies like *Stay Alive*), *The Last Starfighter* feels somewhat like it always deserved one. This might be because the arcade cabinet and the game are central to the plot. It might be the game's creator, Centauri, taking a jibe at the gaming industry when they said "Do you know how long it took to invent the games? To merchandise them? To get them in the stores by Christmas?" But the real reason is perhaps that in the end credits the Atari game was announced. *The Last Starfighter* game would use a new 3D engine - cutting edge for its time. Sadly the movie's average reception, the \$10,000 price tag on a cabinet, Atari's own bad finances and the videogame industry crash halted the game's production in its tracks at around 75% complete. A later game was announced and developed, but in the end all the movie references were stripped and it was sold as *Star Raiders* on the Atari 8-bit. In 1990, the NES got a *Last Starfighter* game, but this was just a version of the Commodore 64's scrolling shooter *Uridium* with new sprites.

Finally, this year a group of designers recreated the arcade cabinet, complete with a new (but accurate) version of the game, for the *Making Of* documentary on the film's recent HD DVD release. Be sure to try out the free game, on the cover DVD. Alternatively, swing by http://www.roguesynapse.com/games/last_starfighter.php for it.



THE MOVIE THAT CREATED DUBYA?

Did *The Last Starfighter* encourage one of America's most controversial presidents into politics? That's the story, at least according to satirical newspaper *The Onion*. In 2003, it ran the story "Bush Cites The Last Starfighter As Inspiration For Entering Politics", in which the president reportedly told a crowd at a Republican fundraiser that he saw the movie in 1984, which encouraged him to go into politics.

"The movie showed me that no matter who you are and where you come from, you can make a big difference," he said. Well, not really, since *The Onion's* articles are fictional. But it's a thought, isn't it?

[Photo source: www.theonion.com]



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ROLL ON 2008

HI FOLKS, WE'RE BACK in swing and 2008 is well underway.

In this issue, among other things, we look at a few really cool motherboards, and in our cattle-herding section, we look at a bunch of value-for-money graphics cards.

I called up a few distributors and told them that I wanted GPUs that are affordable enough for the cheap-ass NAG staff to purchase (and pay the company back over 24 months), in addition to being kick-ass enough for them not to feel embarrassed when entering a LAN with their "I am a NAG employee" T-shirt on and their rig tucked under one arm, their LCD swung over their shoulder, keyboard tucked into long pull-up socks, mouse in their underwear and a power cable used as a belt. Anyway... you get the picture. The bottom line is that you won't go wrong with any of these cards, and in a way it's sad that there has to be a winner.

As far as news from last month is concerned, we have received your mails and after filing those that didn't have the correct heading... Actually, let me refresh your memories and for those of you who didn't read last month's issue (shame on you) here goes.

Your mails (if relevant) will be published in one of two sections:

1. The Hardware Q&A page;
2. The Dream Machine page.

Send your mail with the subject heading 'Hardware Q&A' or 'Dream Machine' to len.nery@tidemedia.co.za. We'll publish the worthy mails with replies from our trusty staff who know the difference between OCZ and Corsair RAM.

Cheers and enjoy the read.

—Len Nery, Hardware Manager

HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5** The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, I probably already have.
- 4** A good deal; worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3** About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.
- 2** This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.
- 1** The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.

SAPPHIRE SPONSORS HARDWARE INTRODUCTION PAGE

NAG WELCOMES SAPPHIRE ATI to the stable and henceforth reader's letters chosen for publishing in the Hardware Q&A section stand the chance of winning a prize each month, courtesy of Sapphire.

Talking about Sapphire... In keeping with their ongoing commitment to the gaming industry, an ATI Radeon HD 3850 512MHz AGP graphics card will be launched worldwide during February 2008 at a suggested retail price of R2,199 (incl. VAT). Obviously, NAG has dibs on the first shipment and we'll publish a review ASAP.



FIT 1 TERABYTE ON A DVD

MEMPILE INC., AN ISRAELI-BASED company, has unveiled a prototype DVD and writer that will eventually be able to carry over 1TB of data – around 1,000 gigabytes. That's a whopping 20 times more than even Blu-ray can offer. The new technology, called Teradisc, will hold over 250,000 MP3s, 115 DVDs or 40 HD movies and should be available to corporate clients in the next few years. The current main benefit of the technology is that it costs a fraction of more traditional large-backup mediums like tape backups, but experts expect that as our need for data capacity goes up, using such large DVDs won't be a weird thing in years to come.

"If HD now is 25GB, you can easily have something that's 300GB or larger in the future," Tom Coughlin, a storage analyst at Coughlin Associates in Atascadero, California, told Computerworld.com, "So I think we've not reached the limits of resolution that people want in their entertainment devices."

Mempile plans to have the first drives ready for corporations in 2011 at between \$3,000 and \$4,000 each, while the first 700GB platter will be made available then for \$30 per disc. What makes its technology different from new developments by companies like Sony and TDK is that instead of using the newer but more expensive blue laser, Mempile employs two powerful red lasers, taking advantage of years of DVD technology.

HARDWARE Q&A:

FIRSTLY, GREAT MAG. I love the hardware section and everything else. I would like to request a laptop showdown in an upcoming issue of NAG. I'm an online gamer, and right now I'm on the road often, so I'm looking to sell my PC and buy myself a notebook. I saw the ASUS G1 and I thought I'd take it, but then I came across the ASUS F3Ka A1, which was just as good but at a better price. Then I saw Alienware and so many other makes that I don't have a clue what to get.

I would appreciate it if you could help me by doing all the hard work and then I can just buy the one you recommend.

Wraith_One

Hi Wraith_One, thanks for the mail. Here's the thing... If you had asked me prior to October last year if I would use a notebook for gaming, I would have laughed, shrugged off your question and you would not see me walking into a LAN with a notebook under my arm and a smile on my face. Today, I'm the converted one thanks to MSI Taiwan! I entered a gaming tournament, played F.E.A.R and won a MSI G600 gaming notebook. In other words, had I not won this notebook, I would still be pro desktop.

Check out the April 2008 issue of NAG; we are doing a hardcore roundup of high-end gaming notebooks from a host of suppliers.

Due to your letter being chosen as the letter of the month, we'll be sending you a gift courtesy of Sapphire.

INDUSTRY NEWS

Every month we receive many hardware-related press releases. We should probably put them somewhere, but don't worry; we'll keep them short.

TO MOVE OR NOT TO MOVE...

RECTRON HOLDINGS HAVE CERTAINLY been at the forefront of bringing the very best hardware to dealers and thus consumers across South Africa. No doubt started from a small dingy office and built up to the monstrous Rectron Technology Park in Midrand, north of Johannesburg, this R60-million building has been the home of Rectron since late 2005 and is truly a stunning building.

When rumours starting surfacing last year that Rectron may be moving back into their old offices, obviously it went hand in hand with the word

'downscaling'. So, after a meeting with Yolandi at Rectron it all became clear. Rectron Technology Park has been sold and the previous premises (currently housing Corex) is to be totally overhauled with underground warehousing and a fully automated system installed for efficient product delivery. I can tell you that this move makes 100% business sense: why waste money on a monster of a building that costs a fortune to run each month when you have a building that is fully paid for, can be overhauled and costs much less to maintain? The move from No. 1 New Road to 152 15th Road, RandjesPark, Midrand is due around June 2008.

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GROUND ZERO

by Toby Hudson

THE PC OF TONIGHT

BACK WHEN I FIRST started working for NAG and SACM, I wrote a feature called "The PC of the Future," which was published in the June 2005 issue of SACM. I wrote this feature looking at upcoming technologies and how they would change the PC.

The main upcoming technologies I covered were a few far-out things like MRAM (magneto-resistive RAM), which keeps its data like flash memory but has speeds like SRAM (and no refresh so it beats conventional DRAM), and things like wireless USB, organic LED screens, etc. One of the things I predicted was that graphics cards would go external, and another was that the small-home NAS would start being the focus of storage, rather than desktop hard drives.

Originally, I set the time at "Five to ten years in the future," thinking closer to five. We're about halfway there, so I thought I'd check to see how we're doing. It turns out we're doing pretty well. MRAM and OLED are still not prime-time technologies, but I still have hope. Wireless USB was delayed but D-Link and Belkin now have a couple of hub kits out there, and one or two notebooks by Dell and others have integrated support.

As for the shrinking and splitting PC, that seems to be coming along well. I'm sure many of you recall ASUS's little external graphics box, but it was pretty limited. However, I stumbled upon a company called Magma that has a double-wide x16 PCI-E box with an x8 low-profile card on the input side and about 200-300W of power coming soon. More than enough for an 8800GT. In addition, I found an iBase MI900, which is a G965-based mini-ITX (170cm x 170cm) board that supports a standard LGA775 CPU such as a Core 2 Quad, has two DDR2 slots (max. 4GB memory), dual Gigabit Ethernet, 7.1-channel audio and a single x16 PCI-E slot. Toss that into a little mini-ITX case with a 100-200W PSU (external power brick required) and it makes a Shuttle XPC look bloated in comparison. We're talking about a footprint about half that of this magazine, and the height of a coke can!

The external graphics thing may seem exotic, but to me it's a no-brainer. We have two competing high-power devices, the CPU and GPU. PC manufacturers have a problem because they don't know

if the end-user will add a hot GPU. So, either they over-engineer their thermal and power designs (big case with lots of fans and a big PSU), or they restrict expandability. The former is big waste for the majority living with integrated graphics, and the latter frustrates the minority who want a fast GPU for games. The graphics card is the last card in the system; all the others are pretty much gone or available externally. The only reason it's still there is because no external bus is fast enough yet. However, with external PCI-E, putting the GPU in its own box with its own power and thermal solution is inevitable. It's the only way to shrink the case, reduce wasted power and make it easier for end-users to upgrade. Win, win and win.

As for the NAS, I had this neat little thing I reviewed a few issues back called the AirLive WMU-6500FS. This little box has a wired 100M and wireless 108M connection, and takes any IDE or SATA HD you provide. It runs a little embedded Linux system and can do nifty things like BitTorrent all by itself. It can also serve all your files up neatly in a network share. I've been playing with this thing over the holidays, using it to watch movies in the living room since our network doesn't reach there. I just plug something into the AirLive's USB port, copy it if I want to keep it there and just read the network share from my media centre. Simple, easy, no fuss no muss. I started thinking: "Why do I need this giant RAID in my desktop if I can just put a 1TB HD for all my media in this thing and hook up two more via USB if I need them?" During my last upgrade, I bought four more drives for my RAID, but I've found that without large media files, I don't really need anywhere near that storage. I wish the AirLive had gigabit speeds, but in reality that's a minor issue since once the files are on it, using them takes very little bandwidth. Moreover, I'm sure the next version will have gigabit speeds.

So, storage as we know it is also probably going to change, and soon. I predict that flash-based hard drives will start replacing magnetic ones in small numbers this year, especially in laptops. Maybe I'll write some more on this with research to back it up in my next column. **NAG**



V7 Wheel



Compatible with Windows 98/98SE/98me/2000/XP
 Available with P.S2+USB(2 in 1)
 Available with XB+P.S2+NGC(3 in 1)
 Available with XB+P.S2+USB+NGC (4 in 1)
 DirectX 7.0a or upper version
 2 axis, 10 fire buttons Wheel, with foot pedals
 Vibration feedback available.
 180 degree rotation

R.R.P.
R199*

Cobra Flight stickV2



Compatible with Windows P.S2/XB/USB/NGC
 4 axes, D-Pad, 12 individual action buttons
 Direct X 7.0 and upper version available
 Z axis with simulate throttle feature
 4 big durable cupules make it fixed and easy to operate
 USB cable length: 1.8m
 Operating current: lower than 100MA

R.R.P.
R149*

Motion sensing



Compatible with Windows 98/Me/2000/XP
 Available with P.S2
 8 way digital direction controller
 Quad-directional motion control
 8 analog action buttons
 10 digital action buttons
 Full real-time sensitivity adjustment
 Direct-X 8.0a or upper version

R.R.P.
R119*

Power Shock



Compatible with Windows 98/98SE/98me/2000/XP
 Available with P.S2+USB(2 in 1)
 Direct-X 7.0a or upper version
 Available with P.S2 function upon requested
 Digital mode (2 axis, 10 fire buttons)
 Analog mode (4 axis, 12 fire buttons)
 Vibration feedback function
 Turbo/clear function

R.R.P.
R69*

Ingenious Grip



Compatible with Windows 98/98se/me/2000/XP
 Digital mode: 2 axis, 12 fire key
 Turbo / clear function
 Direct X 7.0a or upper version
 Available with PS2 function upon requested

R.R.P.
R39*

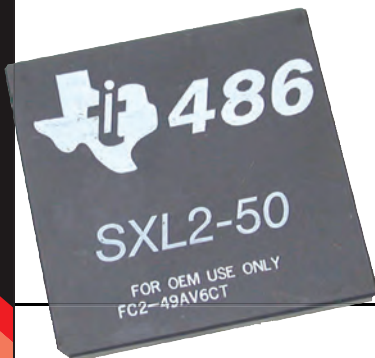
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HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

TECHNOLOGY FOR TECHNOLOGY'S SAKE

IF YOU'RE FORTUNATE ENOUGH to own one of the latest graphics cards (of which there are quite a number), chances are that you have a relatively powerful machine. An E4500 or Athlon X2 5600+ may power it, and it shouldn't have a problem playing any of today's and possibly tomorrow's games. Sure, it can always be faster, and you just might want to use AA in *Crysis* and run *COD4* at 1,920 x 1,080. However, all that is secondary to being able to play the game in the first place.

So here we are in 2008 – brilliant CPUs, high-speed memory, graphics cards that were beyond imagination five or so years ago and on-board audio that matches some professional audio cards. All of this has been inevitable since the advent of consumer computing. Whereas there used to be a constant need for faster, more-powerful computers for the average home user, that drive is no longer there.

If you're the owner of a high-end machine powered by a QX9770 and three GeForce 8800Ultra graphics cards, or using a single-core Athlon 64 3000+ with a Radeon 9700 graphics card, when you watch DVDs, stream music and the like, there's no difference between the two machines. The quality of DVD playback is exactly the same on both. Users are more concerned about the content rather than the hardware that provides that content. Graphics card manufacturers may tell you that you need the latest, greatest, highest-performing part for incredible amounts of antialiasing for gaming. However, people would rather play a

good game than a game that looks good. Being able to play *Army of Two* at 2,048 x 1,536 with 16x AA turned on won't stop it from being an awful title, and the fact that *Unreal Tournament III* doesn't support AA won't stop anybody from playing it. With hardware having surpassed software ages ago, it's no wonder that quite a number of former enthusiasts have moved over to consoles despite them not being as powerful as the computers they moved from.

This isn't me conceding defeat to the supposed war between consoles and computers – far from it. It is me saying that hardware for the sake of hardware doesn't make for a happy consumer. Something that hardware manufacturers need to realise and maybe turn their attention to as the list of PC-exclusive developers dwindles, is that hardware sales are bound to follow. In all honesty, no matter how much we celebrate the arrival of a new 3DMark, it's a benchmark. After all the competition and the praises for ridiculously high scores, it's a benchmark and not the killer application needed to keep an industry alive.

Make no mistake about it: at no point will the enthusiast market die. It may shrink to the size it was a number of years ago, but it won't disappear. There'll always be a market for ultra-high-end computer users, but unlike now, won't be driven by hardware manufacturers promising even faster framerates in nonexistent games. It'll be by the end user who seems to have been forgotten by everyone. **NAG**



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GRAPHICS CARDS 2008

MID-RANGE GRAPHICS CARDS HAVE taken on a new meaning since the introduction of AMD's and NVIDIA's new GPUs in late 2007. Their previous offerings had failed to deliver, but their new parts presented a massive improvement over the older parts. This was because of a number of reasons. To mention just one, these new GPUs were the first DirectX 10 value parts. Striking the right chord in terms of cost versus performance is never easy, and is particularly difficult when dealing with newer technology and denser cores (in gate count) than previous high-end parts.

AMD (with the 2600 range) and NVIDIA (with the 8600 range) didn't quite get it right, and they introduced the graphics cards we have in this roundup. And we are pleased to report that they have succeeded for the most part.

Having increased performance on mid-range parts has resulted in graphics cards that are sometimes faster than their high-end counterparts, and all the graphics cards featured in this roundup will be able to handle all (save for *Crysis* in its DX10 guise) triple-A titles currently available. With that said, let's get to the cards themselves to see which are worth the money.

TEST RIG:

Processor: Intel Core 2 Extreme X9650 @ 4.2GHz

RAM: 2GB Corsair DOMINATOR PC2-9136

Motherboard: ASUS Striker 2 Formula

OS: Windows XP SP2

ASUS EN8800GT TOP

Supplier→ ASUS South Africa | Website→ <http://za.asus.com/> | RRP→ R2,850



SPECS

CORE: G92 (740MHz)
PROCESS: 754 million gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY: 256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (1,035MHz)
ROPS: 16
SHADERS: 128
3DMARK06: 15,118
SCORE: 4/5

ASUS IS BACK WITH the TOP edition of the highly successful 8800GT. The EN8800GT TOP package is the usual ASUS affair. Apart from the graphics card, the bundle includes a D-sub to DVI adapter, an HDTV-out cable, a driver disk and a genuine leather CD wallet. A copy of *Company of Heroes* (also bundled with the ASUS EN8800GT) adds extra value to the

bundle. The overclocked GPU (700MHz core clock) speeds things up a little, and you can actually play *Crysis* at 1,024 x 768 at very high detail without too much lag (even in object-rich environments). If the factory overclock isn't enough for you, we managed to overclock the core clock to 720MHz, which helped performance, especially in the synthetic tests. However, because

the EN8800GT TOP is physically the same card as the standard 8800GT, it means that it gets terribly hot, producing artifacts when the core temperature reaches the 95°C mark. A non-reference cooler would definitely make a difference, but would unfortunately increase the price of this GPU. Overall, the EN8800GT TOP is a solid product featuring fantastic performance.

ASUS EN8800GTS TOP

Supplier→ ASUS South Africa | Website→ <http://za.asus.com/> | RRP→ R3,700



LIKE THE EN8800GT TOP, the 8800GTS TOP is also based on the G92 core. The EN8800GTS TOP doesn't come bundled with any game, making it a less attractive option for the budget-conscious buyer (or so it may seem). However, the EN8800GTS TOP makes up for this by being faster and running cooler than the 8800GT, and to entice potential buyers even more, it's also faster than the mighty 8800GTX (and with a bit of overclocking, even the 8800 Ultra)! The 8800GTS is able to run games at a resolution of 1,600 x 1,200 with low levels of AA. These settings are what most gamers use when gaming and therefore the 8800GTS TOP is an excellent upgrade option for those who still have previous-generation high-end parts or even an

8800GTS 320MB. Not only does the 8800GTS TOP require less power than the GTX or Ultra, but it also runs cooler and is physically smaller.

As with all TOP models, ASUS has factory-overclocked the EN8800GTS TOP, making it faster than the 8800GTX in all the tests we performed - except running games at the highest resolutions and applying excessive AA (which rely heavily on available memory bandwidth). Nevertheless, the ASUS EN8800GTS TOP is fast enough to make it worth recommending over the 8800GTX and possibly the 8800 Ultra. Overclocked even further, the returns are there, but far less than what one would expect as the available memory bandwidth creates a bottleneck.



With this card installed in our test rig, we managed to play *Crysis* at maximum detail at a resolution of 1,280 x 1,024 with no hiccups at all, making it the only GPU in the roundup to manage this feat out of the box.

SPECS

CORE: G92 (700MHz)
PROCESS: 754 million gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY: 256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (1,000MHz)
ROPS: 16
SHADERS: 112
3DMARK06: 16,699
SCORE: 5/5

XFX 8800GTS ALPHA DOG EDITION

Supplier→ Frontosa IT | Website→ www.frontosa.co.za | RRP→ R3,999



WE EXPECTED XFX'S 8800GTS Alpha Dog Edition – with its fancy name – to be a factory-overclocked GPU with headroom for further overclocking (using NVIDIA's nTune or third-party applications), but we were wrong. The 8800GTS Alpha Dog Edition, out of the box, runs at NVIDIA's specified reference clock speed. It's really a letdown on XFX's part, considering that we have become accustomed to its overclocked-edition cards such as the XXX range and the like. With the Alpha Dog Edition we had expected something along the lines of the XXX range, but were greeted with a card featuring a

reference cooler, no bundled games and not capable of matching the other GTS GPUs in this roundup (in terms of out-of-the-box performance and overclocking headroom).

However, given that it's an 8800GTS, it did perform well and while not able to match the other GTS-based GPUs in terms of clock

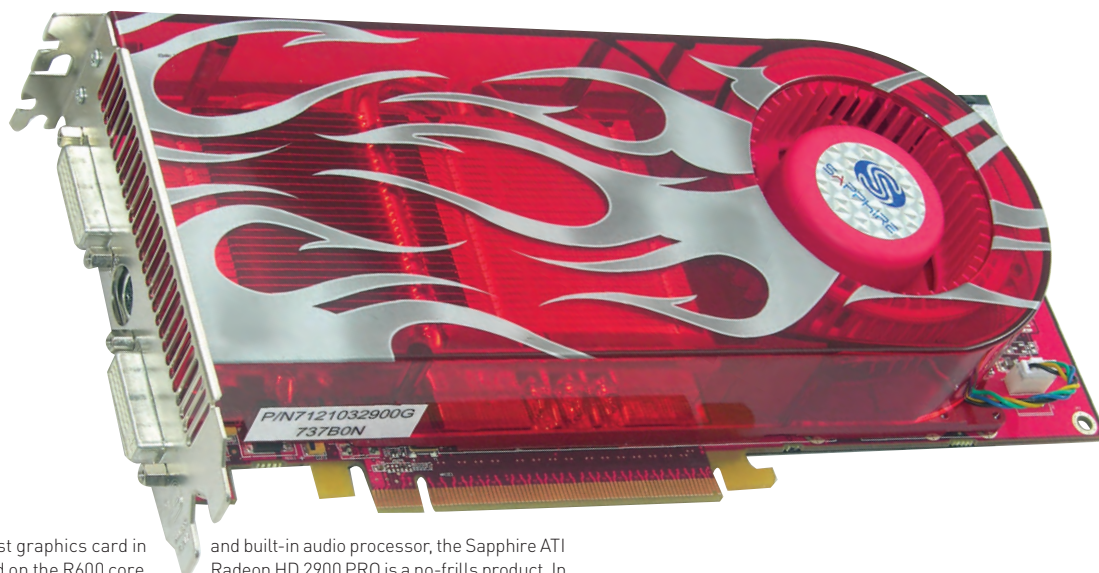
SPECS

CORE: G92 (650MHz)
PROCESS: 754 million gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY: 256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (975MHz)
ROPS: 16
SHADERS: 128
3DMARK06: 15, 261
SCORE: 4/5

speed, it managed to run somewhat cooler, making it unnecessary to fidget with the fan controls to keep it from overheating. The Alpha Dog is a decent product from XFX, but not special enough to make it stand out from the plethora of other cards featuring the same core.

SAPPHIRE ATI RADEON HD 2900 PRO

Supplier→ Frontosa | Website→ www.frontosa.co.za | RRP→ R2,499



THIS CARD IS THE oldest graphics card in this roundup. Based on the R600 core, it's easily the most powerful on paper with its overbearing 512-bit bus and 320 stream processors. It would seem more at home in a roundup featuring only high-end graphics cards. Thankfully, however, the price makes it a mid- to high-end graphics part.

While this may not be the fastest card in this roundup, it's the only one that features video-in functionality. Despite offering the usual features present on all 2900-series graphics cards, such as a DVI-HDMI converter

and built-in audio processor, the Sapphire ATI Radeon HD 2900 PRO is a no-frills product. In terms of performance, this card is more than capable of matching the Radeon HD 2900XT (on which it's based). We were able to overclock this card to 850MHz, boosting synthetic scores in 3DMark05 and improving in-game performance in *Crysis*.

The ATI Radeon HD 2900 PRO is a solid product from Sapphire, still worth a look at if you're in the market for an AMD/ATI-powered card and for some reason or another not impressed with the new HD range.

SPECS

CORE: R600 (600MHz)
PROCESS: 700 million gates (80nm TSMC)
MEMORY: 512-bit 512MB GDDR3 (800MHz)
ROPS: 16
SHADERS: 320
3DMARK06: (N/A)
SCORE: 3/5

GIGABYTE 8800GT TURBOFORCE

Supplier→ Rectron IT | Website→ www.rectron.co.za | RRP→ R4,599

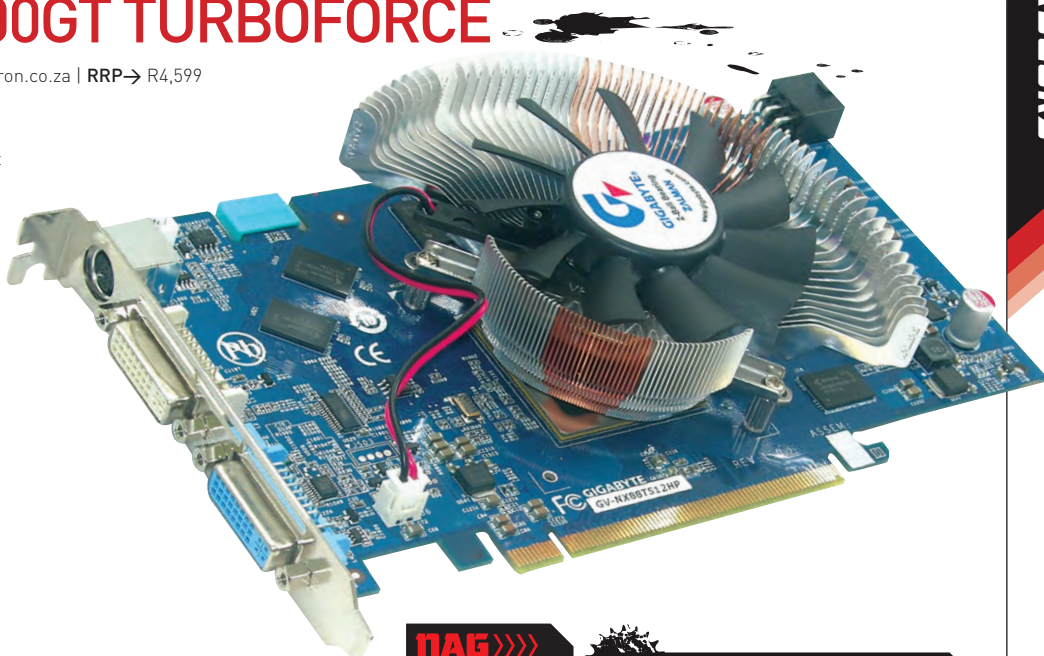
THE GIGABYTE 8800GT TURBOFORCE is the most impressive graphics card in this roundup. It may not be the fastest as that honour goes to a GTS card, but the 8800GT TurboForce is a cut above the rest in this roundup. While the overall presentation is nothing like XFX's offering, it's what's inside that really matters, and this is where the GIGABYTE 8800GT TurboForce really shines.

The TurboForce features a custom PCB that makes use of ferrite core chokes and solid capacitors among other innovations. In terms of cooling, GIGABYTE has gone with a Zalman-designed custom cooler, which does a far better job at managing temperatures than the reference single-slot cooler. All of the above make the TurboForce a fantastic card. Clocked at a very impressive 700MHz, it's faster than the EN8800GT TOP in *Crysis*, even though their 3DMark06 scores are virtually identical.

What further sets the TurboForce apart from the rest is that it can be overclocked all the way up to 756MHz without having to do more than moving a slider. This overclock is the highest for a non-modified 8800GT card we have come across. At this overclock, it was capable of delivering speeds better than those of the XFX 8800GTS Alpha Dog Edition, which is no small feat to accomplish. Without

the overclock, it was close on its heels but not quite capable of matching it.

The GIGABYTE 8800GT TurboForce is an excellent product and is a cut above the rest.



SPECS

CORE: G92 (700MHz)
PROCESS: 754 million gates (65nm TSMC)
MEMORY: 256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (950MHz)
ROPS: 16
SHADERS: 112
3DMARK06: 15,119
SCORE: 5/5

GIGABYTE RADEON HD 3850

Supplier→ Rectron | Website→ www.rectron.co.za | RRP→ R2,799

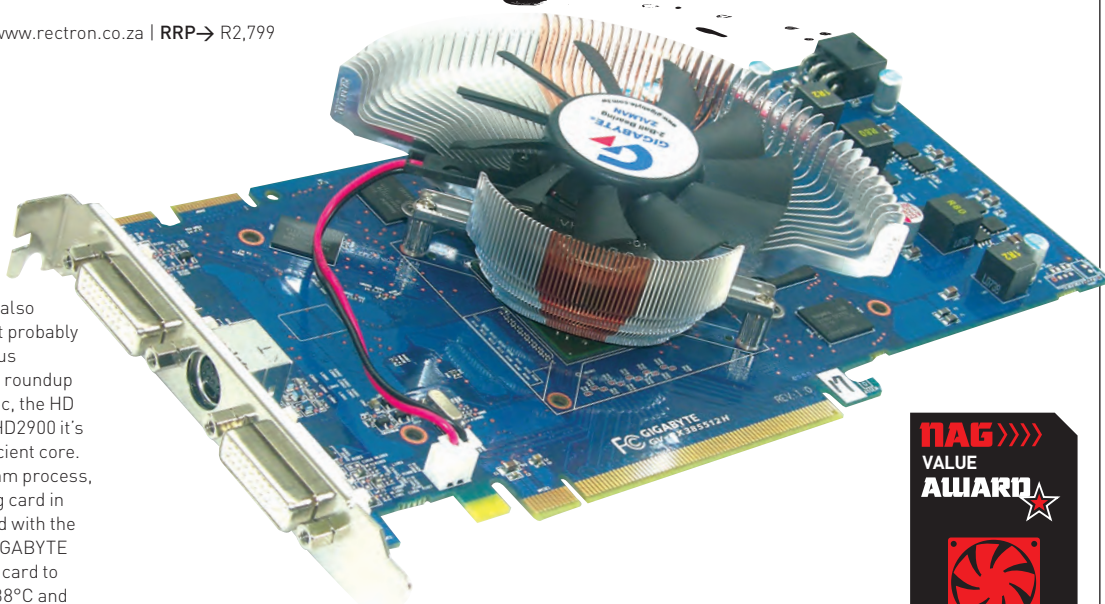
THE SLOWEST CARD IN the roundup also happens to be the cheapest, but probably the best buy in terms of price versus performance. The only card in this roundup to support the full DirectX 10.1 spec, the HD 3850 has half the bit-width of the HD2900 it's based on, but features a more efficient core.

Built on TSMC's impressive 55nm process, the HD 3850 is the coolest-running card in the roundup. The small die coupled with the Zalman-designed cooler, which GIGABYTE has fitted on the card, enabled the card to operate at an idle temperature of 38°C and a load temperature of 51°C. An impressive showing by the GIGABYTE card, especially considering that the fan is whisper quiet. As with the other GIGABYTE entry in this roundup, this card features a custom PCB sporting the same great features as the 8800GT, such as solid capacitors and low-RDS MOSFETs. It's great to see that some thought went into the graphics card's design.

While the synthetic scores of this card are significantly lower than that of the top performer, the card is far cheaper. Because

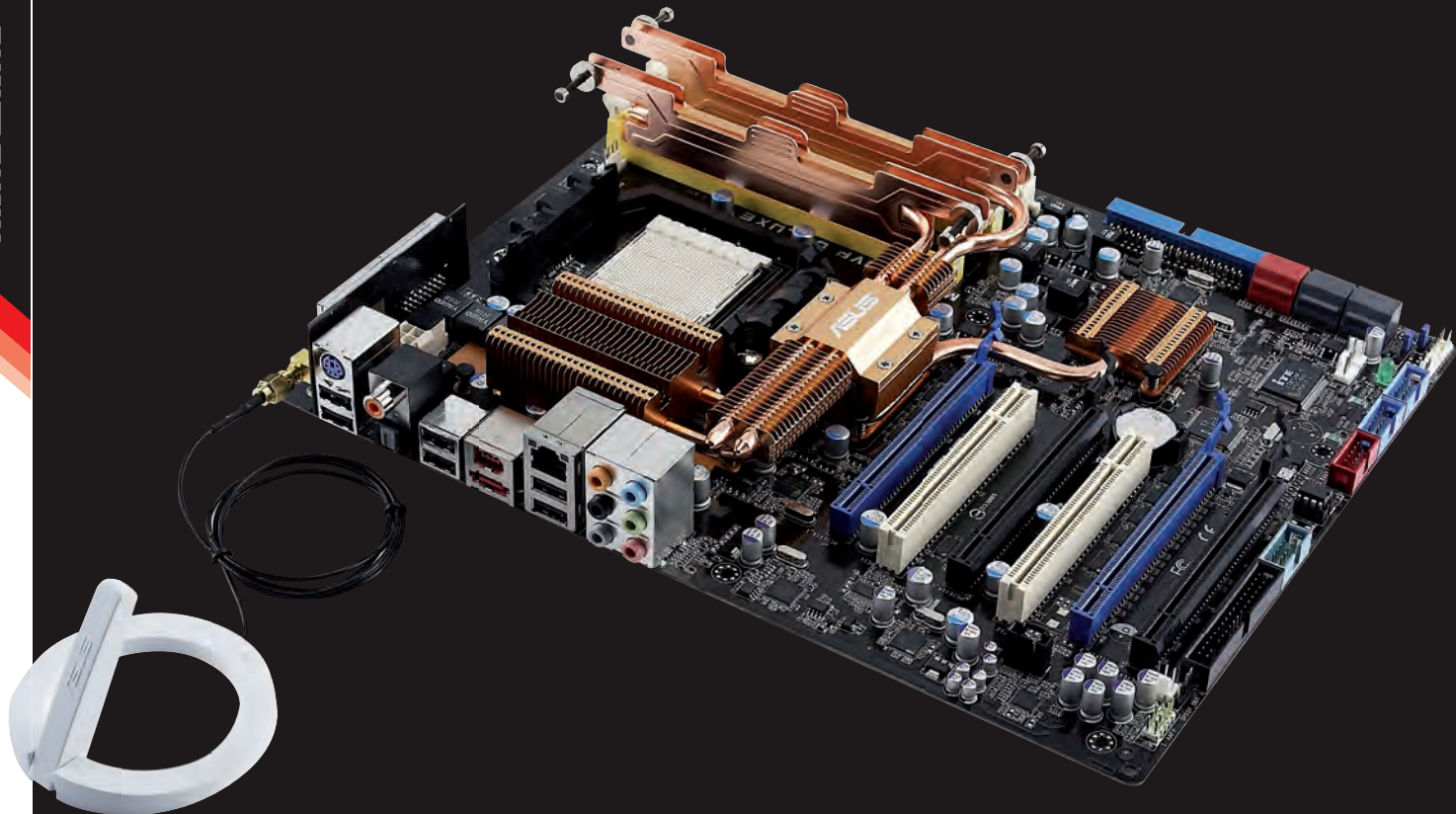
of time constraints, we were unable to perform overclocking tests on this particular card. However, higher clock speeds are most certainly a possibility, and if the GIGABYTE 8800GT TurboForce is anything to go by, the HD 3850 should be able to reach much higher clocks than other 3850-based cards.

The GIGABYTE Radeon HD 3850 is the most affordable card of the lot, but packs enough power to make it a worthwhile upgrade. **NAG**



SPECS

CORE: RV670 (670MHz)
PROCESS: 665 million gates (55nm TSMC)
MEMORY: 256-bit 512MB GDDR3 (830MHz)
ROPS: 16
SHADERS: 320
3DMARK06: 11,449
SCORE: 5/5



ASUS M3A32-MVP DELUXE/WIFI-AP

THE FIRST AM2+ MOTHERBOARDS have started to arrive. ASUS managed to get us one of their first boards based on the AMD 790FX chipset, the M3 M3A32-MVP Deluxe/WiFi-AP (are these names ever simple?), to have a look at. This means a host of new features to go with new CPUs such as the Phenom 9500 we tested the board with.

On the surface, it appears to be a motherboard much like any other. It still, unfortunately, includes the nuisance of heat pipes, but it seems that the flexibility and performance of simple fan-based coolers have been forgotten in the motherboard world. One interesting aspect of this particular cooling setup is an optional extension for the heat-pipe system that is designed to cool the RAM as well. This seems like an interesting idea, but it has a few obvious drawbacks. The first is that the main reason you'd want to improve cooling on your RAM is to improve the performance of high-end RAM, which almost invariably already comes with heatsinks attached. These would need to be removed, and any RAM without heatsinks is likely to be of a performance class where you don't really care about or benefit from extended cooling. In addition, the system can only cool two DIMMs, so for those who plan to use four, cooling may be limited. For those who think that the heat pipe offers better cooling performance than the standard sinks and aren't afraid of things like voiding warranties by removing the heatsinks from their RAM, it may prove an interesting feature.

The first thing that will probably excite most users is the presence of no less than four PCI-E x16 slots. This is a feature of AMD's "Spider" platform, which the 790FX chipset is designed to provide, and the extra slots are for CrossFireX, which means more than two AMD/ATI cards in parallel. Unfortunately, we only had two 2900 XTs and a mishmash

of 38xx cards on hand, so we couldn't give a tri- or quad-setup a go (but the placement of the slots makes it pretty clear that you'll have to use single-slot cards to make a quad-setup fit). Considering the power demands of four 2900 XTs (about 1,000W on their own), that's probably not an unreasonable constraint, so we couldn't fault the M3A32-MVP Deluxe. One thing we found fault with, though, is that the manual's instructions are outright contradicting themselves. The section on installing CrossFire cards in chapter 6 clearly states to insert one card into the blue slot and one into the black slot. However, the table in chapter 2 for the slot mode clearly states that for dual cards slots 1 and 3 must be used (which happen to both be blue). This could pose a problem and leave one card stuck at x1 performance if one follows chapter 6.

Another source of confusion is the SATA ports, which like the IDE port are turned sideways for extra annoyance when plugging in cables. Four SATA ports are black and two are red. One might assume that the red ports are on the third-party Marvell controller, but they're actually the 'master' ports for the 790 chipset. Apparently, it matters which ports your drives are plugged into to be bootable. Two of the black ports on the end are the Marvell controller's.

However, not all is bad. We do have to give ASUS credit for its Q-Connector feature, which makes it much easier to plug in the front panel wires and the on-board Wi-Fi adapter. We wish we could add some overclocking and performance claims to this, but given the current state of Phenoms being recalled and immature BIOSes, we had too many issues to get valid performance numbers. Thus, for the time being, we cannot give this board a fair score, but we have hopes that the bugs will be ironed out soon. **NAG**

Toby Hudson

SPECS

CHIPSET	AMD 790FX
PROCESSOR SUPPORT	AMD Socket AM2+ Phenom FX / Phenom X4 / Phenom X2 / Athlon X2 / Sempron AMD Socket AM2 Athlon 64 X2 / Athlon 64 FX / Athlon 64 / Sempron
MEMORY SUPPORT	DDR2 1,066/800/667/533 4 x DIMMs (max. 8GB)
EXPANSION SLOTS	4 x PCI-E x16 with ATI CrossFireX support, 2 x PCI 2.2, 10 x USB 2.0, 2 x FireWire
STORAGE	6 x SATA 3Gb/s ports, 1 x eSATA 3Gb/s port
CONNECTIVITY	Gigabit Ethernet, Wi-Fi
AUDIO	ADI AD1988 8-channel HD audio

SCORE

N/A

MSI X38 PLATINUM

THE MSI X38 PLATINUM is about what one familiar with MSI's motherboards would expect. It sports everything the latest chipset has to offer and doesn't skimp on bundled features. In this case, the chipset is the Intel X38, designed for newer 1,333FSB Core 2s and DDR3 memory.

At first glance, the board looks pretty standard. The standout features are the four PCI-E x16 slots and the fact that MSI seems to have followed the trend of using solid-state capacitors, which are becoming popular on high-end boards because of their improved reliability. Like the AMD 790FX chipset, the X38 supports CrossFire. However, unlike the 790, the slots are distributed as x16/x16/x4/x4 all the time, instead of a choice between x16/x1 and x8/x8 on each pair. This is good news or bad news depending on what your needs for other cards are. However, most people will be more concerned about support for their preferred CPU, and in this case the X38 wins simply because Intel currently maintains the lead.

MSI certainly included all the bells and whistles on the Diamond series, and this board is no exception. Each slot for memory and cards has its own LED indicator (to indicate activity) and there's a four-character (not digit!) LED matrix display for POST codes, which is fairly readable as opposed to cryptic numbers as on previous boards. There are also on-board reset and power switches, along with power and hard drive LED indicators. One interesting change from the norm is the clear CMOS option, which is actually a button on the back by the ports rather than a jumper on the board, so it can be used without opening the case.

While this board has much to love, we also

found some less pleasant aspects. We had some problems where the board would get stuck in a reboot loop until we cleared the CMOS. The Core 2 QX9770 we used seemed like it needed a BIOS update, so we went to grab one. The 1.0D BIOS that MSI's auto-update utility found for us seemed to solve most of the problem, but it would still occasionally have POST errors.

We also found that the system had an annoying tendency to lock up after a while when using two 2900 XTs in CrossFire. After some testing, we found that hard drive access, which was failing, was the culprit. The problem is that 'bane' of the motherboard world: heat pipes. The Southbridge on the X38 Platinum is just a block connected to a heat pipe that also services the Northbridge and power regulators. The system has no active airflow. With a stock Intel heatsink barely pushing air over the other end of the pipe and two hot 2900s directly on top of the Southbridge, it would overheat causing the drive controller to fail. (This is one of the reasons why we hate heat pipes, since to replace them with a better cooler would require major surgery.) It's just unacceptable, and we cannot recommend this board to anyone planning to run CrossFire in a hot system.

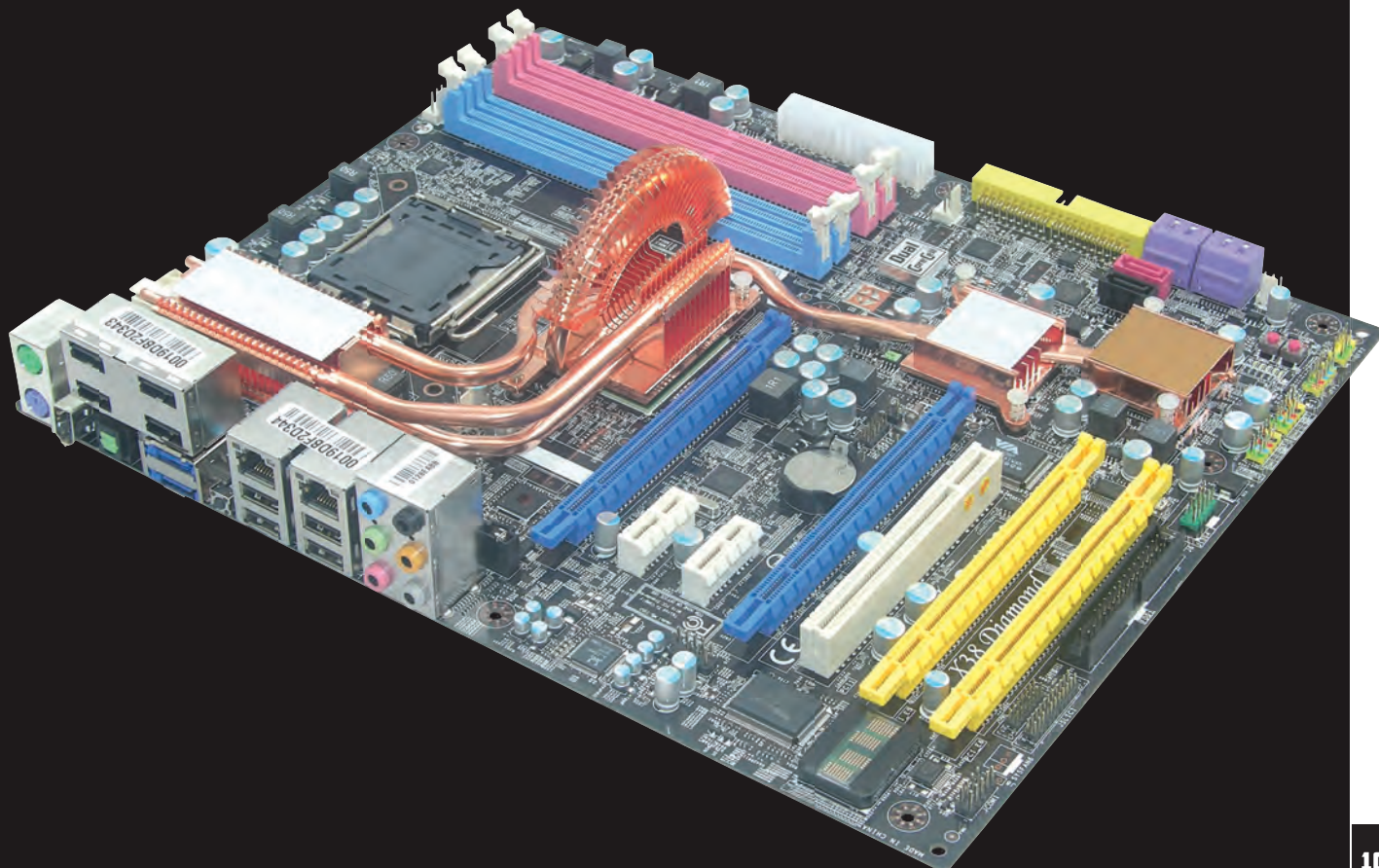
While we loved most of the features of the board, the potential issues for high-performance rigs completely ruined it. This isn't a budget product coaxed into the high end - it's a top-of-the-line part that keels over as soon as you pair it up with its intended partner from the graphics industry. For now, we'd have to say avoid this board. Maybe the upcoming X48 boards will fare better. **NAG**

Toby Hudson

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X38
PROCESSOR SUPPORT	LGA 775 Intel Core 2 Extreme/ Core 2 Quad/ Core 2 Duo/ Pentium D/ Pentium 4
MEMORY SUPPORT	DDR3 800/1066/ 1,333- 4 x DIMMs (max. 8GB)
EXPANSION SLOTS	4 x PCI-E x16, 2 x PCI-E x1, 1 x PCI 2.2, 8 x USB 2.0, 1 x FireWire
STORAGE	6 x SATA 3Gb/s ports, 2 x eSATA 3Gb/s ports
CONNECTIVITY	2 x Gigabit Ethernet
AUDIO	Realtek ALC888 flexible 8-channel audio

SCORE





ASUS V1S NOTEBOOK

A FEW YEARS AGO I was a dedicated desktop junkie, loathing anything that didn't take up a reasonable amount of space on my desk. But as the desktop aged and the option for an upgrade came up, a laptop became a better option. Firstly, laptops didn't suck as much anymore and were much cheaper for the suck level they presented. But my lifestyle had also changed and I needed my machine for much more than gaming. The change was good – I got a lot more done and I'm even more caring about my data. The downside is that it started my slide from PC games towards consoles. I suspect that had a lot to do with the fact that my laptop is, for all intents and purposes, still a piece of crap. It does certain business stuff fairly well and deeply appreciates a RAM upgrade. But when it comes to games, the graphics chip will ask you to hum the tune and it will fake it. (There is a slight upside to this – I've been forced to explore more low-system games and retro stuff.)

In short, if you want to go the laptop route, choose carefully. Even a seemingly decent specced machine can underperform and the choice of a quick hardware swap doesn't really exist. Not unless you are willing to strip a laptop – which I'm not. Laptops, for some reason, also seem to purr on higher system specs. Fortunately, a decent machine that will handle your gaming is fairly affordable these days and it was a godsend when I could use ASUS's V1S for a while.

ASUS has a few high-performance notebooks, specifically the G series for

gaming and several business models. The V1S is a business laptop that is more or less equal to the G1 and G2, except that it has the newer Santa Rosa CPUs from Intel (aka Centrino Pro – apparently these are better for things like laptops). Regardless, next to each other the specs look fairly similar to me. Nevermind, it's a powerful laptop, provided that you have two or more gigabytes of RAM, as it comes with Windows Vista. As yet there are no XP drivers, but ASUS told me the company is working on that.

Pretty much everything it does is easy and the large screen (15 inches capable of 1,680 x 1,050) is really nice and vibrant. In fact, the entire design of the V1S is nice and slick, not too heavy and more than suitably business-looking. In other words, you wonder, would it be possible to get this and claim to your boss that you are getting it for work, not games? With this machine? Yes, definitely, providing your company planned to fork twenty-something grand out for it. But that's what you pay for a decent laptop. The V1S, in my opinion, purrs all that value and it has all the bells and whistles you'd expect (including an HDMI output port).

There is a catch, though. Firstly, anything less than 2GB of that RAM and it turns into a slug. Since there aren't any XP drivers yet, Vista is your only OS option right now and it loves memory. That said, with the right specs Vista is as happy as a pig in Palestine. Secondly, it uses the NVIDIA 8600GT chip, which (according to Wikipedia) is crappy. I'm

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core Duo T7300 2Ghz (or T7500 2.2Ghz)
SCREEN SIZE	15" 1,680 x 1,050
MEMORY	2GB DDR2 PC5300 667MHz
WEIGHT	3kg
DIMENSION	3.5cm x 36cm x 26cm

SCORE



not familiar with the nuanced problems of this chipset, but suffice to say you can do better in that department. The chipset also uses a custom ASUS driver – and having owned an ASUS laptop for a while now, I'm not too happy with ASUS's driver support. This wasn't a huge issue – the games ran just fine, but this is not a de facto gaming laptop.

All that comes to this: if you are willing to step back a version or two, the ASUS G-series notebooks are better. But if you need a business laptop with nice features, all the right tricks and the ability to handle new PC games, I'd recommend the V1S. **NAG**

James Francis



LOGITECH ALTO LAPTOP STAND

LAPTOPS ARE GREAT DEVICES. Your data suddenly become very portable and the boundaries that dictate where you can get your computing fix shift dramatically. There's definitely a sort of liberation with a notebook that a desk-bound PC can't provide, even if you have a power-hungry mobile hog that only moves between your work and home. You know: the kind that squeals when you unplug the power. But these portable computers are not very ergonomic. The most obvious flaw is that the screen sits too low. You could put the laptop on a stack of phone books, but then the keyboard is too high. On top of that, notebook keyboards are cramped and some find them pretty uncomfortable. While the new mobility is great, you sacrifice a lot of the comfort that comes with a desktop PC. Obviously there is a need to meet the two in the middle.

Well, the need has been met for a while now. Laptop docking bays are not a new sight on the market. These conveniently solve the above dilemma - the screen is lifted to eye level and a keyboard and mouse can be plugged in to simulate a desktop PC. Some models come with their own keyboards, as is the case with Logitech's Alto.

The keyboard connects to your notebook via USB, which also powers the two additional ports in the back. Sporting classic Logitech design, the keyboard is nice to type on and comes with the standard extras, such as a calculator button and volume controls. It certainly is comfortable and it becomes hard moving back to the laptop's own keys. The Alto folds up in a sturdy keyboard-sized container which is easier to get ready than packing the computer into its bag. Overall it's a nice bay - the only real complaint is that the alternative Windows key (the one

that acts like a right-click) is now a special function button shared with Pause (of all things) and not within comfortable reach of your digits.

Alas, since it's slightly larger than a laptop (in width, at least), it won't fit in most bags and hence is not THAT portable. But for the rest this is really comfortable and well worth getting if you spend a lot of time at a desk working on your laptop. **NAG**

James Francis

SPECS

DIMENSIONS	36mm x 428mm x 237mm
PORTS	2 x USB 2.0

SCORE



NAG >>>>
HARDWARE
AWARD ★



**Laptop not
included.
Damn.**



HARDWARE

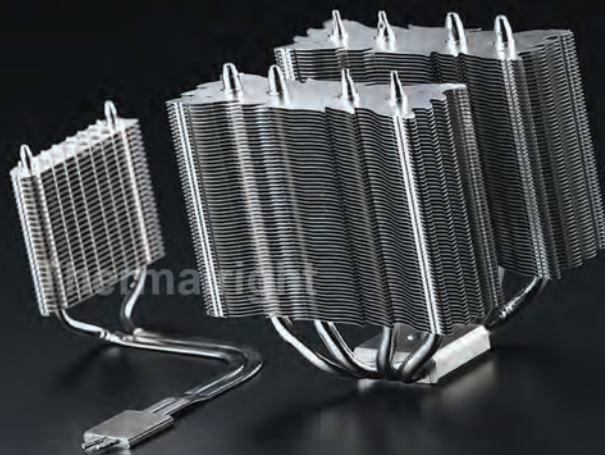
RRP → R949 | Supplier → Frontosa | Website → www.frontosa.co.za | Brand → Logitech

Thermalright

IFX-14

Inferno Fire eXtinguisher

Quench the fire in your computer system



Back-side heat pipe Cooler



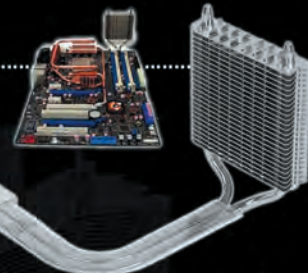
IFX-14 Heatsink Body

- * Larger surface area for heat dissipation
- * Designed for better air flow management to work with the heatsink fans and the air inside computer case
- * Optional to rotate the heatsink 90 degrees to best fit your system configuration
- * Multi-platform compatible backplate for installation on vast number and type of motherboard.

Weight: 790g (heatsink only)
Dimension: L146.2 x W124 x H161 mm (heatsink only)
Recommended Fan: All 120mm & 140mm Fan

IFX-14 Back-side Heat Pipe Cooler

Back-side dual heatpipe heatsink adds additionally cools CPU and also takes care of the heat coming from the back of the motherboard to extend the life expectancy and stability of motherboard



Weight: 138g (heatsink only)
Recommended Fan: All 80mm & 70mm Fan
Dimension (heatsink only): L134.6 x W163.5 x H112.6 mm



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BATTLEFIELD REINVENTED? FRONTLINES FUEL OF WAR

IT IS 2024. WHAT some consider the third world war has begun. The Western Coalition, led by the USA and EU, against the Red Star Alliance – China and Russia. Despite predictions that it would begin and end with a nuclear exchange, it hasn't. Who started it depends on who you believe – the press, the blogs, the tinfoil hat brigade. It doesn't matter. All that matters is the oil. What's left of it anyway.

Some would think with oil running dry there would be none left for tanks and jets. But it's the civilians that will suffer the shortage first, while the military grabs whatever it can from other nations. The light seems to drag on. Cold, hot, on and off, but never quick or easy. People have started saying that our last drop of oil will be burned by a tank. Maybe they're right.

A NEW CONTENDER

This is not your father's Battlefield. *Frontlines: Fuel of War* is the first game developed by Kaos Studios. What some people don't know is that Kaos has some serious talent in its ranks. Some of the original Trauma Studios team, who were responsible for the *Desert Combat* mod for *Battlefield 1942*, and later *Battlefield 2*, are now working for Kaos. See the box out on Kaos Studios for more info.

THQ flew us to New York to meet with Kaos representatives and the *Frontlines: Fuel of War* team, and get some hands-on time with the game. We tried to absorb as much as possible so that we could give you a heads-up on what looks to be one of the most interesting titles in the FPS world this year. More than just another mod or a re-imagining of *Desert Combat*, *Frontlines* is *Battlefield* extended (and possibly a more

true successor than the game that bears the number 2 after the original name). The basic concept is the same, but it has been refined and expanded. Complaints and shortcomings have been addressed, and new ideas added to improve upon a good start.

The main new idea is the *Frontlines* concept itself. One of the problems with team-based FPS games is that on large maps players spread out to try to cover many objectives. This leads to a less interesting game, as the forces never really meet for an all-out clash. To solve this problem, the *Frontlines* system changes the active objectives (usually capture points) as the game progresses. This means that although a map may have a dozen or more



CLASSES AND ROLES

Instead of all players being equal or a simple class-based system, *Frontlines: Fuel of War* lets players choose both a Class and a Role in multiplayer matches. The Class defines the basic lead-out of the player. The Sniper will obviously have a sniper rifle, while the Anti-Vehicle class has a missile launcher and Close Combat has a shotgun. The Role is what special abilities the player will gain as they level up.



There are four roles, each with a different set of abilities. Ground Support can repair and deploy both manual and automatic turrets. The EMP Tech specialises in disabling vehicles and drones. The Drone Tech can deploy a variety of air- and land-based drones. Finally, Air Support can call in air strikes and friendly aircraft.

capture points, only a few are active at a time (usually fairly close together and forming a line). Once the objectives are achieved, the controlling team can use them as spawns to move their forces forward. This gives the players a focus to concentrate on, which leads to much more interesting and fast-paced battles.

WHAT'S NEW IS OLD

Frontlines: Fuel of War is set in the near future, during an extended war between two major world factions over dwindling oil reserves. The team explained that the reason why they chose this specific period was so that they could have their cake and eat it too. They wanted to incorporate the latest state-of-the-art technologies in use

today, but still have the conflict seem like a gritty, prolonged war, which people have begun to get tired of fighting. Thus, we can see lots of high-tech hardware that looks worn and battered.

The single-player campaign promises to be quite a bit more than bots running around the multiplayer map. At our sneak preview in New York, we got to play some of the campaign on both the PC and Xbox 360 versions, and were impressed at the attention given to the cut-scenes and overall plot development as well as the gameplay. Those who eschew the online world of FPS games for lack of plot will certainly find something worthwhile here, so don't overlook it simply because you're more

Frontlines: Fuel of War is set in the near future, during an extended war between two major world factions over dwindling oil reserves.

KAOS STUDIOS

Kaos Studios may seem like a relative newcomer to the industry, but in reality, they're a well-honed veteran dev team. Fans of the *Battlefield* series will likely recall the popular *Desert Combat* mod by Trauma Studios. Digital Illusions CE picked up Trauma in 2004 and tasked it with developing *Battlefield 2* for Electronic Arts. However, shortly after *Battlefield 2* was released, DICE indicated that they were shutting down Trauma.

Some of the guys just wouldn't stand for that, so they jumped ship to THQ's stable and formed Kaos Studios, which began work on *Frontlines*. While *Battlefield 2* was mostly just a remake and update of *Desert Combat*, *Frontlines: Fuel of War* takes many of the concepts a notch further, bringing some innovation to gameplay (much like *Battlefield* did to the generic FPS community back in 2002).



of a solo player. The FFW team has spent a lot of time developing an AI that's more than just multiplayer bots thrown on a single-player map, and FFW should provide a more interesting single-player experience. (See box outs on AI and battle chatter for more details.)

2 and 2142 is that the special abilities unlock rather quickly as you play on the server, but the unlocks are not persistent. Instead, they are controlled by server variables so that new players need not feel hopelessly outclassed against veterans with access to better weapons. Unlocked special abilities may reset each round, map, or at a specific condition set by the individual server.

The basic gameplay itself seemed very solid, and the drones added a fresh new area to explore. We had lots of fun in both single- and multiplayer, flying and driving the small

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

We also got to spend some time with Frontlines' multiplayer mode. From what we saw, the game is a solid contender, with many rough edges of previous games in this category smoothed away. We particularly liked the flexibility of the class/role system, where players can customise their special abilities independently of their load-out, making for some interesting combinations like Sniper/Air Support or Anti-Vehicle/EMP Tech. (See box out on classes and roles for more info.)

One significant difference from Battlefield

DRONES

The Drones are a major feature of *Frontlines: Fuel of War*. Not only do they often appear in the single-player campaign where they are strewn about much like regular weapons, but they appear as a selectable role in multiplayer mode as well.



Drones range from fairly simple scout helicopters and exploding RC cars, to more advanced platforms that can mount mini guns, rockets and mortars.



Drones also play a critical role in recon, as enemies they detect within range are highlighted on all friendly HUDs.



▲ The AI will say what they see and feel, so you will hear everything from screams of excitement to cries for help in desperate situations. ▲

BATTLE CHATTER

Another component of the single-player experience is what's called the battle chatter system. Much like the reactive AI, what NPCs say is based on the environment and not scripted. This will hopefully cut down on a scenario many people are familiar with: the single-player AI sitting behind cover, constantly repeating instructions like, "Take out the sniper in the window!" despite the fact that the player is busy with another objective.

units around trying to sneak up on enemies and take them out by surprise. The drones integrate well with the game and don't feel like some tacked-on afterthought that was crammed into an already working system. The vehicles also seem to fit in well and are neither useless, lumbering targets nor invincible juggernauts of destruction. Final balancing was yet to be done, and Kaos is expecting a lot of feedback from their limited FilePlanet Beta. What we played was already extremely good, and with a bit of extra tuning, should come very close to perfection. We expect that both fans and critics of previous games in this category (such as the Battlefield series and Enemy Territory) will want to try this one to see if it suits them. Even Team Fortress 2 players will likely find a number of similar elements that make Frontlines worth considering. **NAG**



AI

The key to making the single-player campaign enjoyable for a team-based FPS is to have a good AI. Players often get frustrated with bots that do little more than charge straight at the enemy or hang back and expect the player to do everything. The *FFOW* team has spent quite a bit of time working on the bots so that they will react realistically and take the initiative to assist the player, rather than just being decorative cannon fodder for enemies. The way this works is that the AI is dynamically reactive to the environment and not scripted. It sees the game much as the player does, and makes decisions based on the situation.

Nothing is scripted; they say what they see and they will flank you and use whatever is available to take you out, including vehicles.



What you see here is the 'BattleBus'. The civilian militia have taken this public means of transportation and retrofitted it with a machine gun and some makeshift protection.

VEHICLES

Frontlines: Fuel of War boasts a large array of vehicles. There are supposedly more than 60 in the game, though we didn't have a chance to count them all yet. They range from the typical Humvee and tanks to helicopters, APCs and even the dreaded BattleBus, as seen here:



CHICAGO SWEEPS CGS WORLD FINAL

ELEVEN FRANCHISE TEAMS FROM the four corners of the world [with the notable exception of Africa] were flown to Los Angeles last month to participate in the highly anticipated Championship Gaming Series World Final. The teams that made the cut were a diverse array: Rio Sinistro (Brazil), Mexico City Furia (Mexico), London Mint and Birmingham Salvo (UK), Singapore Sword (Singapore), Sydney Underground (Australia), Seoul Jinhwa (South Korea), Berlin Allianz (Germany) and Stockholm Magnetik (Sweden). China's Wuhan Dragon became the first casualty of the tournament, getting knocked out before the tournament began by their archrivals, the US Embassy, who denied their travel visas.

Each of the various regions had had their qualifying tournaments. In the UK and Europe, these were simply for seeding purposes, but teams from Asia, Australia and the Middle East had to fight for their tickets to the final (which Wuhan, Sydney, Singapore and Seoul ultimately won). However, none of these qualifications was anywhere near as rigorous as the US regular season, which ended with a one-point win for the Chicago Chimera over the Carolina Core. The CGS media machine had been playing up the rivalry between these two teams as the show's main draw card, and the prevailing predictions were that the Americans would destroy everybody else – after all, they had already learned the hard way that a franchise needed to be made up of more than just individual players.

Sure enough, the extra experience seemed to place the two US representatives in a class of their own – especially the Chicago Chimera, who dominated their European opponents, Stockholm (overall score 34:9) and Birmingham (25:17). And while the Carolina Core only narrowly survived a challenge from the Berlin Allianz (final score 22:21, with an 11:7 *Counter-Strike: Source* victory clinching the win), it would have been a surprise to see any other team stepping up to face Chimera in the final.

Instead, the surprise came in how easily Chicago won the \$500,000 first-place prize. On paper, the two teams were evenly matched. Between them, they had the top two Dead or Alive male players, the two worst *FIFA* players and *Counter-Strike: Source* teams, whose results had been uncannily similar over the regular season. Not to mention the memory of their last nail-biting encounter.

However, fortune seemed to repeatedly swing Chicago's way. *CS: Source*, which went to Carolina, was close enough not to matter. And then the Chimera Dead or Alive players took their opponents apart piece by piece. Even the Core's US champion, Ryan "Offbeat Ninja" Ward, couldn't hold a candle to newly crowned World Cyber Games winner, Jeremy

"Black Mamba" Florence. Mamba won with a crushing 5:1 score, instantly negating Carolina's *CS: Source* advantage. Chicago's Marjorie "Kasumi Chan" Bartell then showed that she had moved on from her disappointing losses to Carolina's Kat "Mystic" Gunn during the regular season, this time beating her comprehensively, also with a score of 5:1.

Andrew "Anomaly" Brock, Chicago's *FIFA* player, kept the momentum going with a 2:1 win over Nick "Peekay" DePalmer (who remains the man everyone loves to hate). And by the time it came to the final game, *Project Gotham Racing*, the nail had already been hammered into the Carolina Core's coffin. Down by five points, Joe "Phantom" Tackett and Brent "Rex" Dimapilis would have had to take (at least) first and third place in the race. This may not sound like too much to expect from a world final match, but their opponents just so happened to be the untouchables, Wesley "Ch0npr" Cwiklo and Jason "Jason-X" Exelby. Chicago's duo had never lost a race before, and with nothing but 8:1 and 6:3 walkovers to their credit the entire

tournament, things weren't about to change any time soon. As it happened, the final score was again 8:1 in favour of Chicago, bringing the final match score to rest at 27:15.

With this latest paycheck and a \$25,000 Most Valuable Player award to boot (which went to a well-deserving Black Mamba) the Chicago Chimera were, in prize-money terms, the world's highest-grossing e-sports team in 2007, beating established European multi-gaming giants such as SK Gaming, Fnatic and Meet Your Makers. In the end, the first season of the CGS may not have been what everyone was expecting, but its success has clearly shown that bringing competitive gaming to the masses can be done. A source close to the CGS informed us that planning for 2008 has been underway for quite some time already, and while not much is expected to change in terms of the league's structure and game choices (for the moment), we can expect another polished, professional setup that continues to push e-sports to new limits. **NAG**



CGS WORLD FINAL STANDINGS AND PRIZE MONEY:

1. Chicago Chimera (\$500,000)
2. Carolina Core (\$150,000)
3. Berlin Allianz (\$70,000)
4. Birmingham Salvo (\$70,000)
5. Singapore Sword (\$30,000)
6. Stockholm Magnetik (\$30,000)
7. London Mint (\$30,000)
8. Mexico City Furia (\$30,000)
9. Rio Sinistro (\$15,000)
10. Seoul Jinhwa (\$15,000)
11. Sydney Underground (\$15,000)

THEY DON'T CALL IT "DIE HARD" FOR NOTHING

THE ELECTRONIC SPORTS WORLD Cup (ESWC) is now the only major international gaming tournament to support deathmatch (one versus one) first-person shooter titles. The reason for this is partly the collapse of the World Series of Video Games and partly the rise of 'TV friendly' leagues like Major League Gaming and the Championship Gaming Series. As a result, the genre that gave birth to e-sports is on the verge of extinction. But it isn't dead yet. Despite the risk of alienating mainstream audiences, the ESWC's president, Matthieu Dallon, has insisted that deathmatch will always remain a part of his event. "This family of games offers the most obvious demonstration of what a cyberathlete is and what electronic sports should be," he said in a statement last month.

The hardcore community has had to wait quite some time for the announcement of the official deathmatch game for 2008. When the 'primary' list was unveiled several months ago, it contained only the expected trio of *Counter-Strike 1.6*, *WarCraft III* and *Trackmania Nations*. But in early December, the ESWC organising committee confirmed that there will be an additional two games at the tournament. The first will be *Defense of the Ancients (DotA)*, and the second – a die-hard in itself – *Quake III*.

The big shock is of course the absence of *Unreal Tournament III*, which was widely expected in place of the now eight-year-old *Quake* game. Responding to critics of the move, Mr Dallon commented, "The last titles on our shortlist were *Quake III*, *Quake*

4, *War\$ow* and *Unreal Tournament III*. We have taken the necessary time to evaluate all the new games. In the end, none of them can yet guarantee the minimum conditions for becoming a genuine e-sports platform: stable, open to broadcast, and supported by its studio or the community through a mod."

But why choose *Quake III* over its successor, *Quake 4*? "We have finally chosen *Quake III*," answered Mr Dallon, "because it is the best technologically – it has the best client-server broadcasting tools, [developer] support – and because it is the best display for the show and the public." He also mentioned the long-term potential of the game, in light of id Software's announcement of the *Quake Zero* project, which will be a free Web game based on *Quake III*.

This leaves *Unreal Tournament's* future hanging in the balance. *Quake Zero* is likely to be released some time in 2008, as a precursor to *Quake 5 Arena*, which will be a full id title utilising the Tech 5 engine. This effectively means that *Quake* will be supported at the ESWC for at least the next three years, by which time *UT3's* competitive life may well be over.

While *Quake* fans rejoice and *UT* followers lament, the quiet winner in all of this is the competitive *DotA* community, which has long been waiting for an endorsement of this magnitude. If the 2008 ESWC tournament is successful, it will greatly help to ease *DotA's* transition from casual pastime to professional electronic sport – a move it has thus far found particularly difficult. **NAG**

E-SPORTS TODAY DENIED

SO, AFTER CANCELLING THEIR World Series and destroying the dreams of hundreds of aspiring e-sportsmen in early 2006, then **doing the same thing** again in mid-2007, Angel Munoz's Cyberathlete Professional League is not exactly enjoying massive popularity right now. And what they **really** didn't need was for the G7 organisation of top professional gaming teams to start boycotting their events because of unpaid prize money.

Despite the fact that the CPL practically invented e-sports back in the late 1990s, I cannot see Munoz and Co. recovering from this. Oh, they'll be back in some form or another, I'm sure, but as it's often said, "Fool me once, shame on... shame on you. Fool me... you can't get fooled again." The community has had enough, I think.

Where does this leave us? Is this the end of the 'open' international gaming tournament? Perhaps. The only independent majors left are the World Cyber Games and the Electronic Sports World Cup (which both have limited qualification spots per country). It's no longer feasible for a person to fly to events and 'just sign up'.

What this really means, strange as it may sound, is that gaming is indeed crossing over into the realm of professional sports. The CPL, for all its talk about professionalism, didn't contract players or pay them a regular salary. Organisations such as these, including the likes of the ESWC and WCG, all cater to amateurs – even if they're well-paid amateurs.

In a way, it's sad. We're losing out on a whole range of exciting games that aren't well received by mainstream audiences (to which leagues like the Championship Gaming Series must cater). On the other hand, the rise of these new, truly professional leagues signals a historic turning point in the business model that supports competitive gaming. If the CPL has taught us nothing else, it's that the old way of doing things was unsustainable. It's always better for e-sports to survive and grow, even if it has to change. There will always be room to revisit the old-school game types later, thought they may always be a niche market.

Anton Lines



SLIDE IN PICTURES

INSTEAD OF PRINTING RAW SOURCE CODE, LIKE THE MAGAZINES OF YORE USED TO, WE'RE GIVING YOU A SERIES OF PICTURES AND A CHALLENGE. THE CHALLENGE IS TO MAKE GAME MAKER (OBTAINABLE ON THE DVD) LOOK JUST LIKE THESE SCREENSHOTS AND YOU'LL HAVE YOURSELF A GAME.

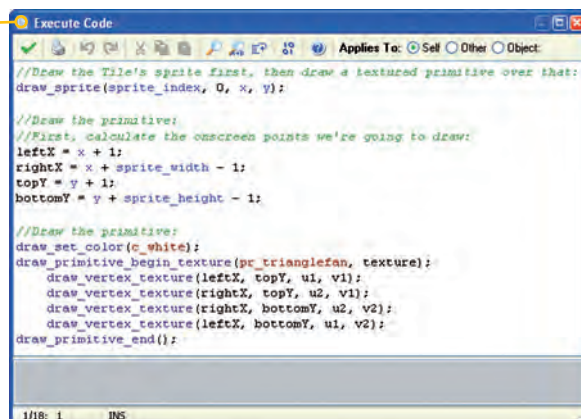
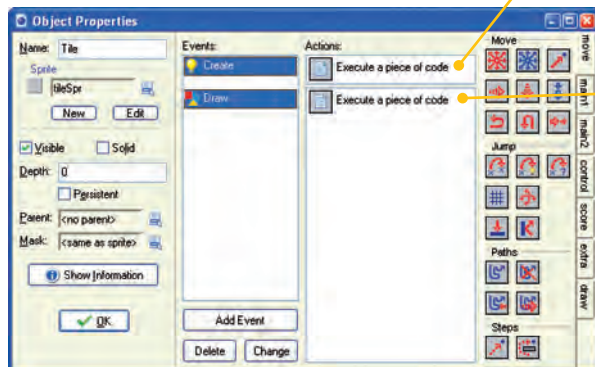
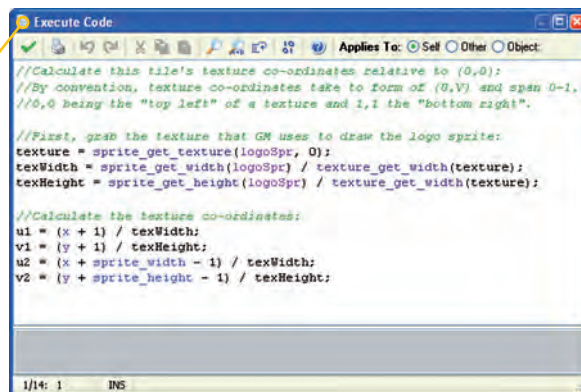
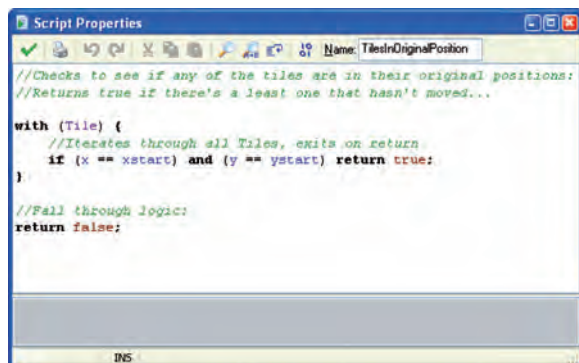
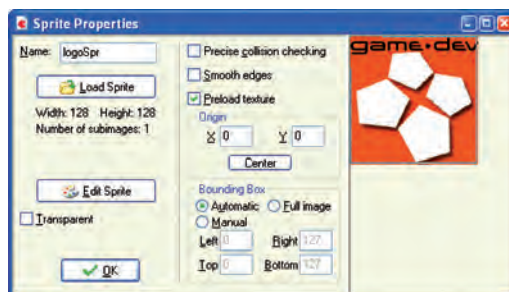
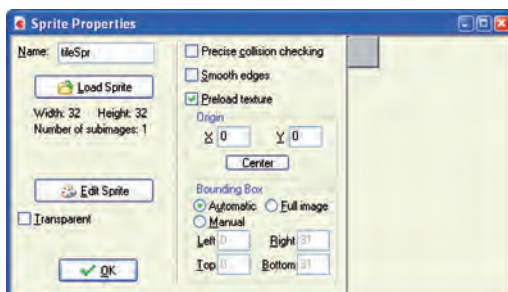
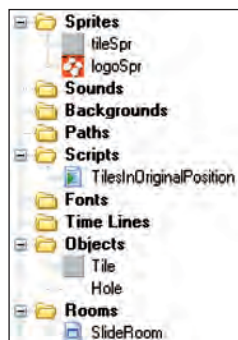
WHILE A SIMPLE GAME in itself, we're using *Slide* (which many of you will have played as a physical, tile-manipulation game) to introduce some very handy concepts in Game Maker that will be useful in your later games.

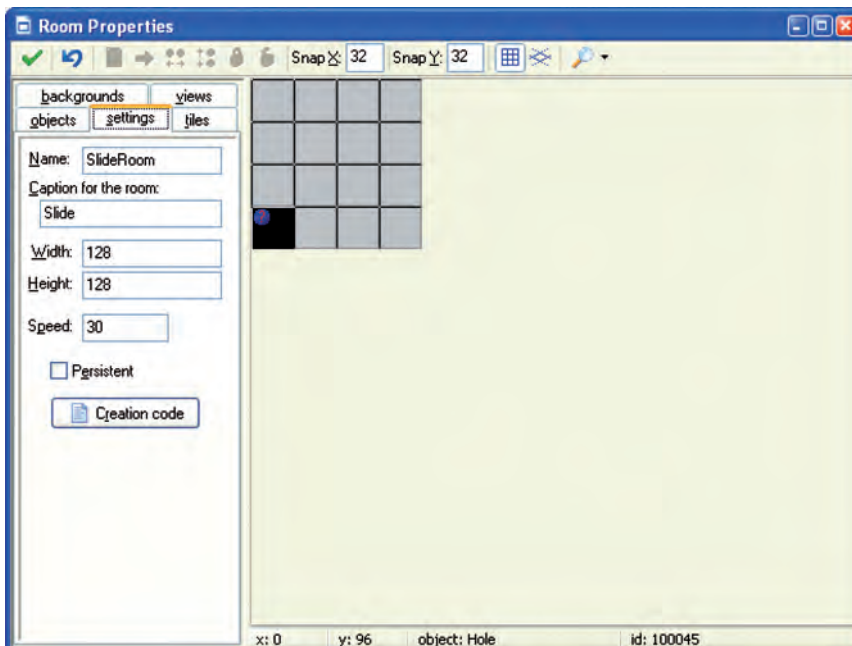
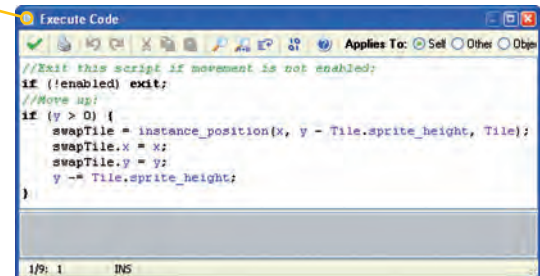
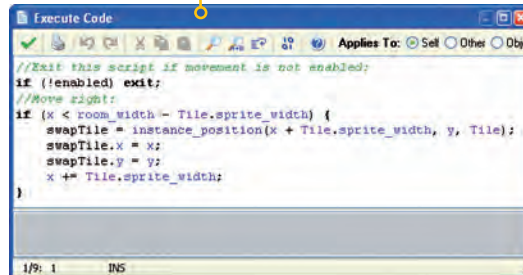
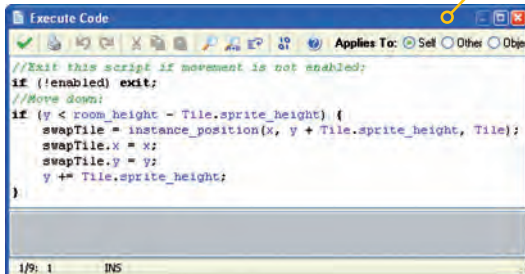
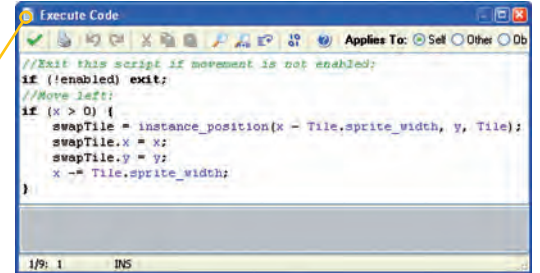
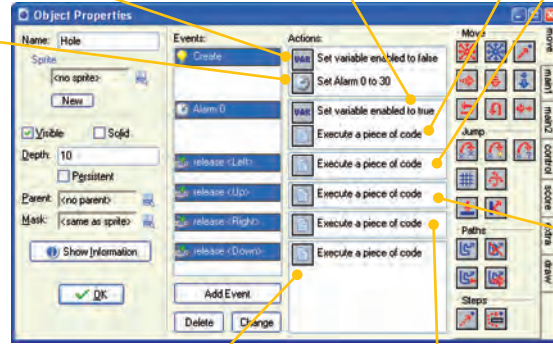
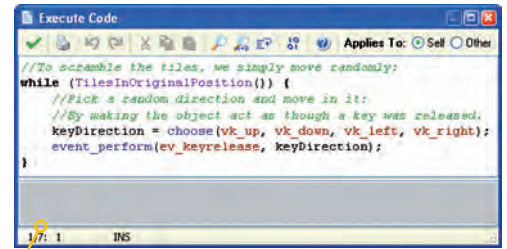
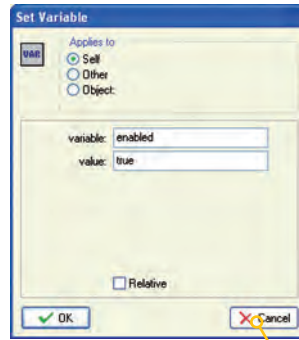
The first concept is drawing using primitive shapes. Game Maker gives you tools to draw points, lines and triangles – which on their own don't sound too useful, until you realise that any modern game draws everything as collections of triangles

(which we tend to call polys). Primitives give us a lot more control than sprites, because we can manipulate their shape, colour and texture in real time. We use primitives to display a small part of a larger sprite, a 128 x 128 image that you can find on the DVD. In the Tile object's draw event you can see how firstly the type of primitive is specified, then a list of vertices (or points in space) is given before ending the primitive.

The second concept is that of scripts: Scripts in Game Maker are a way to create your own customised functions. Once written, you simply call a script the same way you would use `point_direction()`, passing it the correct parameters and getting a result. Notice how the `TilesInOriginalPosition` script is used in Hole's alarm event.

As always, any requests, questions and even criticism should be sent to the helpful people over at <http://www.gamedotdev.co.za>





Halloween

James Francis: **JF** | Miktar Dracon: **MD** | Michael James: **MJ** | Nati de Jager: **ND** | Alex Jelagin: **AJ**

Director: Rob Zombie

Cast: Scout Taylor-Compton, Malcolm McDowell, Daeg Faerch

Genre: Horror

Rating: 18

Score: ★★★★★

AFTER 1000 CORPSES AND *Devil's Rejects*, Rob Zombie felt he was skilled enough to remake the slasher of slashers. Even though there have been such movies before and since, John Carpenter's *Halloween* is sacred slasher ground to many. The formula it created has influenced everything from *Friday the 13th* to *Scream* (and beyond). Carpenter gave the project his blessing and told Zombie to make it his own. This he did. In an attempt to give a new dimension of brutality to Michael Myers, a healthy chunk of the movie delves into Michael's past as a kid and how, according to his psychologist (Malcolm McDowell), he became the "perfect storm" of a psychopath. A pure killing machine, this he demonstrates early by slaughtering most of his



family. After nearly two decades in the mental asylum, Michael escapes and heads back to his hometown. It sounds like it winds a bit, but the legwork pays off, delivering both suspense and in-your-face murders that the genre has rarely seen. Purists might not like it, but this is a revisioning that gives *Halloween* its bite back (thirty-plus years aren't kind to horrors), much



like the *Dawn of the Dead* remake. To be honest, very little remains of the original, but that movie wasn't anything else than a slasher anyway. Sure, some movies can be remade to near identical stature (*The Hills Have Eyes*), perhaps *Halloween* as well, but it deserved more. Alas, no special features, so fans might want to hold off for a special edition. **JF**

Black Snake Moan

Director: Craig Brewer

Cast: Samuel L. Jackson, Christina Ricci, Justin Timberlake

Genre: Drama

Rating: 16 (VSL)

Score: ★★★★★

THE WHOLE MARKETING CAMPAIGN of this movie is criminal because it's going to chase away exactly the kind of people who'll enjoy it and attract those who won't. The poster and trailer are suggesting that this movie might have a few sex scenes involving chains, but what it's really about is a story of a friendship between a promiscuous white girl (Christina Ricci) from an abusive background and a recently divorced black man (Samuel L. Jackson). The story and intimate setting do a good job of drawing you into the movie and then the excellent performances of Ricci and Jackson seal the deal. Justin Timberlake also plays a small but important part in the

movie and, while not hardcore as the main characters, does a decent enough job, but nowhere close to his role in *Alpha Dog*. End of the day, it's a compelling movie so don't be put off by the suggestive theme or the fact that Christina Ricci spends most of the movie in a pair of panties and a short T-shirt. There are some special features on the DVD that explore the Blues theme in more depth and the director's commentary is interesting to listen to and unusually conversational, providing insight into his personality away from the highlighted events in the movie. The deleted scenes are of a high quality and very relevant as they add to the final movie, as opposed to a blooper reel which would have ruined the feel of the production. If you've grown bored of giant robots and animated turtles and are interested in a little cultured viewing, then *Black Snake Moan* comes very highly recommended. **MJ**



Pixar Animated Shorts Vol. 1

Director: Various

Cast: Various

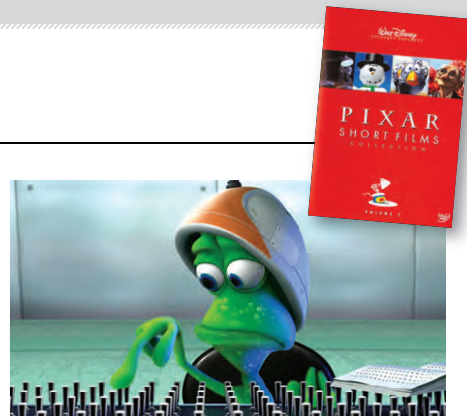
Genre: Animation

Rating: All

Score: ★★★★★

BEFORE FINDING NEMO, **BEFORE Toy Story**... before Pixar even became an animation company, they were already pioneers in the art of computer animation not just technically, but spiritually. Originally developing medical imaging hardware (with a weak software side working on applications for said hardware), Pixar began life humbly. For fun, staff produced animated shorts to showcase their ability and work, evolving the software tools as the years went by. From there, with a lucrative LucasArts platform, Pixar grew from strength to

strength, producing some truly memorable animated shorts in context to the technology of the time. This first volume showcases thirteen shorts, from the first (*The Adventures of Andre & Wally B*) to the latest (*Lifted*, as seen before *Ratatouille*). You get commentary on each one by producers and directors (with the exception of *Jack-Jack Attack* for some reason), as well as a "The Pixar Shorts: A Short History" documentary that provides rather brilliant insight into the origins and early years of Pixar, (as well as a good idea of how they got from there to here). If you've ever had a passing interest in how Pixar became the undisputed masters of computer-generated imagery, this is as good a place as any to start. We recommend watching the documentary



first to get a little perspective on why each short is the technical and emotional masterpiece it is. The price is just right too. **MD**



Rush Hour 3

Director: Brett Ratner

Cast: Jackie Chan, Chris Tucker, Hiroyuki Sanada, Max Von Sydow, Noémie Lenoir

Genre: Action comedy

Rating: 10 (LV)

Score: ★★

DON'T NORMALLY ENJOY SLAPSTICK comedy, but even though the *Rush Hour* movies certainly have elements of it, Jackie Chan "I do my own stunts" Chan brings something unique to the party. Of course, Chris Tucker adds his brand of goofy, slapstick, high-pitched, hysterical (in the mental disorder sense, rather than the "very funny" sense) humour to the mix. As always, the martial arts scenes are both technically impressive and comical, in a way that only Mr Chan is capable of. Action and laughs abound, as well as a very sexy lady! The humour includes incongruous bits such as a nun acting as an interpreter in a multilingual swearing match, as well as Frenchmen (most of the story takes place in Paris) deprecating Americans – always good for a laugh! In every respect, this movie cannot be considered any sort of cinematographic masterpiece, and neither does it carry any sort of thought-provoking message – but it is definitely fun to watch, and great for when you are looking for something light and undemanding to watch. Never have the Triads suffered from such a lighthearted, irreverent depiction! Sadly, the extra features are almost completely absent,



consisting entirely of a trailer and nothing more. However, a hallmark of the *Rush Hour* movies are the 'bloopers reels' at the end, and this one is no different. It is therefore very worthwhile to watch these while the credits roll (Chan: "We could put on a dirty movie. I like the ones with a story." "I like the one with the locker room scene." "I like the one with the shower scene." "I like the one with the horses."). **AJ**



Another Gay Movie

Directors: Todd Stephens

Cast (English): Michael Carbonaro; Jonah Blechman; Jonathan Chase; Mitch Morris

Genre: Dreadful Comedy (NAG's newly created genre)

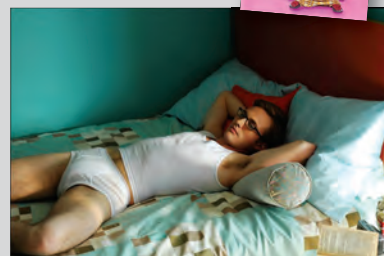
Rating: 18 (LNS)

Score: ★

THE EMPLOYEES OF TIDE Media [publisher of NAG and SACM] fall into five distinct categories: gaming sluts; gadget whores; hardcore floozies; the rest of us; and James, the only gay in the Tide Media village.

Because James is the only gay in the village and this hack's homophobic, he decided that I should review *Another Gay Movie* as punishment (and punishment it was).

Let's be honest about *Another Gay Movie*: it's not a movie, nor is it a film; it's a flick! *Another Gay Movie* tells the story of four gay friends who make a pact to lose their virginity (you know what kind) before the end of the summer. And that's about where this flick's story ends. What follows is a gay 'rom-com' skit that's as pathetic as this review's intro. The viewer (if there'll be any after this pathetic



attempt at writing a review) follows the escapades of our four friends in their attempts to get a good 'stuffing' before their friend Muffler's big Labour Day party. Along the way (and this is a dreadfully long way), one of our antiheroes has sex with a warm quiche; another has extreme bowel movement due to having used three enemas; a giant dildo makes a predictable appearance; and the only climax in this film is courtesy of a wet dream.

DVD bonus features: deleted scenes; Nancy Sinatra making of "Another Gay Sunshine Day" featurette; pillow talk with Grandpa Muffler. **ND**

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Mr. Brooks

Director: Bruce A. Evans

Cast: Kevin Costner, William Hurt, Dane Cook, Demi Moore

Genre: Thriller

Rating: 16 (VLS)

Score: ★★★★★

ALWAYS FIND IT TRICKY to write a review on a film that is this good, and whose plot elements I am trying not to spoil. At such times, even quoting from the synopsis on the back cover is liable to reveal too much. So, without spoilers, this film makes a credible attempt at giving us a glimpse into the possible mind of a serial killer. Kevin Costner plays what is arguably his most interesting role to date, reprising the part of (paradoxically) the protagonist killer, Mr. Brooks.

He is faced with some tricky decisions, as well as having interesting conversations with himself as he debates his options. The story is quite clever, and even though it doesn't feel extremely action-packed, a fair amount happens. The style appears quite stark and straightforward, which only serves to underline the killer's clean and clinical, yet nevertheless artistic, methodology and style. Demi Moore plays the policewoman who is trying to uncover the killer's identity, and her performance is credible, if rather unexceptional. I cannot tell you what characters the other actors portray without divulging too much. Overall, by means of a masterfully understated execution, this movie delivers an exquisite and



thought-provoking story. It misses a perfect score only through its total lack of extra features other than a handful of trailers for other titles. **AJ**

TMNT

Director: Kevin Munroe

Cast: (Voice) Chris Evans, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Patrick Stewart

Genre: Animated Action

Rating: PG (V)

Score: ★★★★★

GRAB SOME PIZZA DUDES, the turtles are back and looking exceptionally good (and yes, at least two pizza references are allowed for this review). Fans of the original television series are in for a big shock as the *Ninja Turtles* have received a shiny new modern makeover. As a bonus, this has been achieved without losing any of the essence of the original and while the movie is a touch darker than what you might remember, it's all still stylish. From a CG point of view, *TMNT* is

a treat to watch, especially the fight scene between Leonardo and Michelangelo. It's all in the details you see: rain drops running off green skin, flashes of lightning and the dark city skyline all work their magic to create one of the most intense, although short, fight sequences we've seen in a while. The voice talent involved here includes Patrick Stewart, Chris Evans and Sarah Michelle Gellar, all with solid performances and convincing emotion. Oddly, the turtles are voiced by relative unknowns. The movie is also a safe bet for kids and while many dads might have ended up reluctantly dragging their kids to see this in the cinema, they were probably in for a real surprise as the movie entertains and speaks equally well to both audiences. The DVD comes with a few decent extras and will appeal to



anyone with an interest in the animated moviemaking process. There are also some deleted scenes and an alternative ending and beginning. Overall it's a cracking movie that is so good that you'll often forget you're watching computer-generated giant green turtles fighting demons and eating pizza. **MJ**

Vacancy

Director: Nimrod Antal

Cast: Luke Wilson, Kate Beckinsale

Genre: Thriller

Rating: 16 (VSL)

Score: ★★★★★

A DIVORCING COUPLE IS ON the road back from a family gathering and the trip just isn't fun at all. To make things worse, their car breaks down and they are forced to overnight at a local motel. But reality suddenly becomes much crueler when they discover a set of videotapes depicting the violent murders of other people in the same room. Soon it becomes obvious that they are trapped in a setup for snuff films and they have to try and get away from the masked

killers terrorising them. All of this takes place at the motel and its lot, largely vacant except for the couple, their killers and the occasional extra character swooping in for one reason or another. Now, this formula could go either way, but *Vacancy* makes for a very tight, tense thriller that is bound to give you a few jumps. Personally, I enjoyed the movie a lot because it was a welcome break from the extremities of *Wolf Creek* and *Hostel*. That means there are plenty of scares and frights waiting for you, but it's not a gore-fest with terrible, in-your-face deaths or any nasty surprises. The most unnerving scenes are from the videos the couple find and the rest is simply a solid



ride of "will they or won't they make it", thanks to smart plot twists and nice camera work. The special features are sparse, but there are deleted scenes and a making-of feature. **JF**

The Dark Crystal (25th Anniversary Edition)

Director: Jim Henson and Frank Oz

Cast: N/A

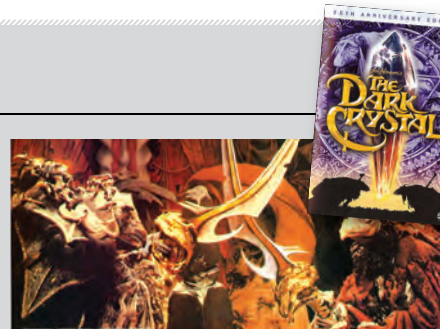
Genre: Fantasy

Rating: PG

Score: ★★★★★

IT IS AMAZING HOW many people have not seen this old masterpiece. The movie was made with puppets and costumes, and much effort went into its making. By today's standards, the special effects may, at first blush, appear rather primitive, but taken in the proper context, we realise that not only were they advanced for their time, but also extremely laborious. This special edition consists of two disks, with the movie itself on the first and the special features on the second. The latter

consists of lengthy and in-depth "making of" material and interviews, as well as some character artwork and some additional scenes that were not ultimately used in the final cut. These unused scenes convey a much darker undertone to the story, as well as additional insight into the world of *The Dark Crystal*. Unfortunately, this rare footage no longer exists in high quality anywhere. And what about the movie itself? For those of you who have not seen it, the story deals with a gelfling's quest to fulfil an ancient prophecy about the restoration of balance between good and evil to the world. (The gelflings are somewhat akin to elves in conventional fantasy.) The story combines drama, mystery and humour. The scenes feature amazing attention to detail, which brings this



rather luridly coloured world to life. If you have not seen this film, you ought to at least watch it once. Please bear in mind that although the story is fantasy and is depicted via puppets, this is not necessarily a children's movie, as some dark and violent themes are explored. **AJ**

Pan's Labyrinth

Director: Guillermo del Toro

Cast: Ivana Baquero, Sergi López, Maribel Verdú

Genre: Fantasy

Rating: 16 [V]

Score: ★★★★★



BEFORE WE GET STARTED, it's important to know that *Pan's Labyrinth* is in Spanish with English subtitles and is definitely not for children. Set just after the Spanish Civil War, the movie is a magical blend of the brutal drama of war and the mystical wonder of fantasy. The story tells of a young girl, Ofelia, in a dangerous and difficult situation, who escapes by finding her true place in the world. Through the efforts of the production team, actors and script, these two disparate worlds coexist flawlessly and while many of the fantasy pieces parallel the events unfolding in the real war-ravaged world, they're so well directed and filmed that there's no clear distinction between what's real and what's make-believe – brilliant. *Pan's Labyrinth* is also brutal. Capitán Vidal, the bad guy protagonist, is a terrifying and uncompromising sadist, and the war and ensuing struggle between the two sides cast a deep shadow over everything. The movie assaults you on all fronts with disturbing scenes, incredible detail and fantastical settings, leaving you enthralled and disturbed with its edginess. There just isn't enough space here to really get into the film and get across just how good this movie is, so you're going to have to take a chance and trust us. Aside from the movie, there isn't

anything too exceptional in terms of extras on the DVD; however, the Director talking about the symbolism in the movie and giving examples is fascinating, making a second viewing essential. This is a must see movie end of story and if you don't like it you must be an uncultured dungeon dweller. **MJ**



Monty Python Live at the Hollywood Bowl



Directors: Terry Hughes, Ian MacNaughton

Cast (English): Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, Michael Palin, Neil Innes

Genre: Live Comedy

Rating: Fish

Score: ★★★★★

IF YOU KNOW *MONTY* Python at all, you should know that they expect you to sit on their face and tell them that you love them. Everyone else: this DVD serves up a great, steaming heap of irreverence and surrealism courtesy of one of the finest comedy troupes ever to have insulted the British. Culled from their four nights at the Hollywood Bowl in 1980, the DVD contains a selection of sketches, songs, short-films and Terry Gilliam animated pieces – all favourites from the BBC series *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

It's good to see the Pythons interact with a live audience and as expected, the skits are every bit as funny live, even gaining a certain something from being less hermetic than those



in the shows and movies (such as *Holy Grail* or *Meaning of Life*).

There's no extra stuff, but you do get singing philosophers, lumberjacks that are okay, the pope, an organisation dedicated to silly walks and a rather suspicious-looking Albatross vendor. If that's not special features, then perhaps the universe isn't too clear on what's special these days. But some behind-the-scenes stuff or even posthumous documentary footage wouldn't have hurt. At least, it's cheap; much like the satire. **MD**

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The Protector

Director: Prachya Pinkaew

Cast: Tony Jaa, Petchtai Wongkamlao, Bongkoj Khongmalai

Genre: Action

Rating: 13 [V]

Score: ★★★★★

WHEN THE TWO FAMILY elephants are stolen by a crime syndicate, the son follows the criminals from Thailand to Australia. Here he encounters a vast criminal organisation and getting his pets back will prove a lot harder. Luckily, he's pretty good with his hands, feet, arms, elbows, knees and forehead. Action aficionados can tell you about *Ong Bak*, Tony Jaa's explosive debut into the genre. Like it, *The Protector* (also *Warrior King* or *Tom yum goong*) is fleeting on story or character development and generally all about the action. So, as there, it's encounter after encounter that escalates the stunts and fighting with every scene. Being an unofficial sequel, *The Protector* also has to outdo



Ong Bak's stunts, which it really does. One might almost be tempted to declare Jaa and the rest of the team as the current kings of movie stunts. No wires, no CG – just lots of practice and excellent



choreography. Unfortunately *The Protector*'s story suffers a lot, especially because it tries to be more complex. No extras – real fans should try and import a special edition. **JF**



Casshern

Directors: Kazuaki Kiriya

Cast: Yusuke Iseya, Kumiko Aso, Akira Terao, Kanako Higuchi, Fumiyo Kohinata, Hiroyuki Miyasako, Mayumi Sada, Jun Kaname, Hidetoshi Nishijima, Mitsuhiko Oikawa, Susumu Terajima, Hideji Otaki, Tatsuya Mihashi, Toshiaki Karasawa

Genre: Sci-fi drama

Rating: 16 [V]

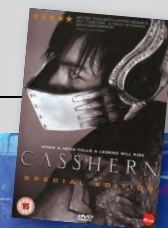
Score: ★★★★★

MY EDITOR WHEN ISSUING me with this title for review, described it as "live-acted anime", and I must say that it's a very apt description. This film is a live-action re-imagining of an anime television series dating back to 1973, and there is also a book (in Japanese). The artistic style can only be described as unique. It mixes black and white, sepia-tone, and a variety of colour biases ranging from the washed out to the lurid. The audio is also used in very creative ways, sometimes loud, sometimes subdued. The musical score is most unusual in that it has two distinct moods, and these are sometimes switched between suddenly, (and occasionally

switched back again very quickly). Moods (or, more precisely, nuances of emotion) play an important part in this film, and it is vital to follow the dialogue so as not to miss anything. Unfortunately, given that the dialogue is in Japanese, this means reading subtitles, which detracts and distract from enjoying the spectacular visuals. The story starts off with a scientist who is trying to develop the ultimate in medical technology: the ability to regenerate any organ or tissue. As is usually the case in sci-fi, his experiments go awry, and he ends up accidentally creating a race of, essentially, superhuman mutants (as well as resurrecting his dead son, who returns as Casshern...). The military, overseeing the experiments, promptly tries to exterminate this new species, and the survivors escape and plot revenge. However, this merely acts as a backdrop for philosophical exploration of the ideas of violence and war, (among others). The performances are of a



type that only the Japanese (and Chinese) with their taste for high drama and intense emotion can deliver. The second disk contains the bonus features, which include deleted scenes with commentary, interviews, and some additional behind-the-scenes insights. At well over two hours, this feature film is well worth it, particularly if you're into art films, or unique things that are not run of the mill. **AJ**



Millennium: The Complete First Season

Directors: Chris Carter

Cast: Lance Henriksen, Brittany Tiplady, Terry O'Quinn, Megan Gallagher

Genre: Crime, Horror

Rating: 18

Score: ★★★★★

IT FEELS LIKE SO much time has passed since the days of the *X-Files*, *Twin Peaks* and other great shows. The real reason is that over the past decade we've started to enjoy some really great television and it feels like almost ever genre is at least covered at some point or another. For fans of the strange and disconcerting there has been some rich pickings: *Carnivale*, *Dexter*, *Jericho* and *Supernatural* are a few names from a growing group of shows that look at the darker side of things, and sometimes the unnatural. Years

ahead of them, in 1996, *X-Files*' Chris Carter created another show, starring the grim-faced Lance Henriksen as a psychic investigator able to see the same visions that drive serial killers. He is employed by the Millennium Group and uses his skills to stop some rather demented and evil people from killing. But as the season progresses, there is a theme that perhaps not all evil is from man and that larger forces are at work. There's also the Millennium Group itself, which seems a bit too mysterious. This series pushed the envelope when it came to mature television and broke ground delving into dark topics. *Lost* fans can also catch Terry O'Quinn (Locke) in one of his earlier big roles. Fans of the series will also get two commentary tracks and three features with the box set. **JF**



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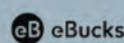


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COMICS

Written by Clive Burmeister

NORTHLANDERS #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Vertigo
Writer: Brian Wood
Artist: Davide Gianfelice
Price: R24.50

NORTHLANDERS, SET IN 980 AD, is a tale of a Norse warrior, who after discovering that his father is dead, sets out on a journey to his homeland in order to claim his birthright: his father's money. But having left at an early age, his land is not what it once was, and neither is he. No longer the weakling they remember, Sven returns to his village and confronts his uncle Gorm, who has claimed Sven's land and title as his own. The comic is nicely written, encompassing a fresh feel to the whole "Viking story" genre, and the characters already hint at more depth to their personalities than is found in many similar books. As a first issue, it is hard to predict where the story will go, as it already throws the reader into the thick of the story; but the fast pace also provides a gripping urgency to find out what comes next. If you enjoy the rough, battle and bloody, Norse-styled comic, we'd suggest this title.



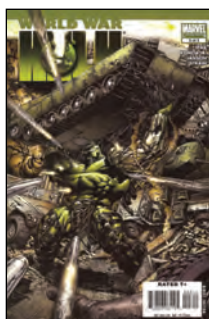
WORLD WAR HULK

Format: Crossover Storyline
Publisher: Marvel Comics
Writer: Greg Pak
Artist: John Romita, Jr
Price: Around R35 per issue

YOU HAVE TO PICTURE it: a giant holographic projection of a really pissed-off Hulk towering above the crowds in Times Square saying, "Puny Humans. I've Come To Smash." It's good to see the big, green, rage machine get some quality plot-line once more, after having been relegated to some really bland stuff in the past few years.

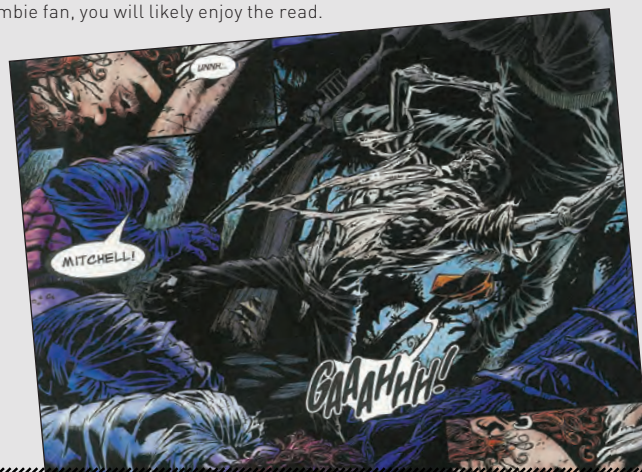
World War Hulk is a crossover story published in 2007, comprising five main issues titled *World War Hulk*. It started with the one-shot *World War Hulk Prologue: Worldbreaker* and the short of it is: Hulk got shot into space by various superheroes on Earth who didn't want to deal with the big tantrum anymore (because they couldn't, Hulk was getting stronger than any other superhero). In space, Hulk ended up on a planet, formed his own civilisation by acting as rational (if monosyllabic) ruler and was totally happy. Then a space vessel he built blew up (he blames The Illuminati, a secret group of top superheroes who try to remain invisible), killing his wife and unborn child as well as millions of inhabitants of his planet.

Fuelled by ultimate Rage, Hulk returns to Earth, beats the crap out of a few superheroes and then proceeds to rip Earth a new one. The Hulk hasn't looked this good in a very, very long time and action, fans will get a kick out of the whap-kapow-*krackoom* brawls.

THE ZOMBIE:
SIMON GARTH (#1 OF 4)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Marvel MAX
Writer: Kyle Hotz
Artist: Dan Brown
Price: R31.95

MARVEL MAX PRESENTS ANOTHER zombie comic with *The Zombie: Simon Garth*. In keeping with the Marvel Max line of comics, it is a graphic, violent and explicit comic, and really gory for all the zombie movie fans. Besides that, I can't help but think this theme is becoming somewhat overdone now. The comic does give the main zombie character a bit of a twist in personality, but the rest of the comic, to me, feels a bit too generic in this flooded market of zombie stories. That being said, however, there is nothing wrong with the way it is put together with its artwork and writing, and if you're a zombie fan, you will likely enjoy the read.



THIRTY DAYS OF NIGHT

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: IDW
Writer: Steve Niles
Artist: Brian Templesmith
Price: R179.00

SO, WHAT IS THE one major threat a vampire faces? Garlic? Van Helsing? Anne Rice fans? Nope, it's sunlight. The blood suckers can do their thing as long as there are no harmful rays around. As it happens, in the parts of the globe farthest from the equator, there are days and nights that last a month. An enterprising vampire figures this out and organises an ambush party that quickly isolates the town of Barrow, Alaska. Most of the citizens are killed, but a few survivors manage to hide from the killers. Then the oldest vampire of them all arrives... Using very intense and expressionistic artwork, this is quite different for a horror novel. There is plenty of blood and a fairly straightforward story: perhaps not everyone's cup of tea, but it's worth checking out. A movie based on this graphic novel series is being produced as well.

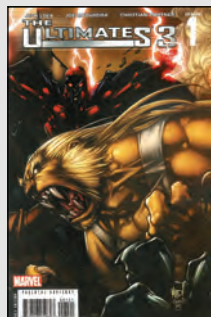




THE ULTIMATES 3 #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Jeph Loeb
Artist: Joe Madureira
Price: R21.95

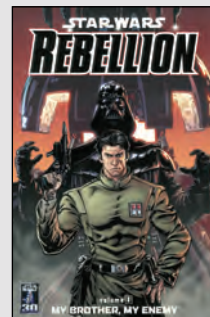
THE ULTIMATES VOLUME 3, Issue 1, is, in a word, amazing. Awesome artwork graces every page. A gritty story with the kind of writing that keeps you glued to the comic seizes your attention in every frame. What else can I say? It's a really good first issue, and I hope it keeps up this quality for the whole story. Judging by the other titles in the Marvel Ultimate line, it probably will. This issue kicks off with the latest scandal: sex tapes of The Black Widow and Tony Stark (a.k.a. Iron Man) plastered all over the media to give the Ultimates yet another PR nightmare. And from there things only get worse, with an old enemy bursting through the wall to take them on, totally unprepared and disorganised. And even after they pick themselves up again, trying to figure out what to do about all the issues coming to the surface, tempers begin flaring throughout the team, making things even trickier. I can't wait for the next issue, given the cliffhanger Issue 1 ends with. But don't just take my word for it check it out for yourself.



STAR WARS REBELLION VOLUME 1: MY BROTHER, MY ENEMY

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Dark Horse
Writer: Rob Williams
Artist: Badaeux / Lacombe
Price: R129.95

SET NINE MONTHS AFTER the Battle of Yavin, this book continues the epic story of the *Star Wars* universe, providing more atmosphere and background to the original tale. Packed full of action and intrigue, ambushes and spies, this volume captures the feeling of the *Star Wars* saga and its main characters. And although the events portrayed in *Star Wars Rebellion Volume 1* are set during the original trilogy and therefore can't alter the outcome, they still provide suspense at what will happen in this brief time period. This is an entertaining book, and is bound to be a rewarding read for *Star Wars* fans and action fans alike, while providing a kind of sad nostalgia at what can't be recaptured in the excitement of seeing the original *Star Wars* movies back when we were kids. I wouldn't call this book a masterpiece, but it is entertaining. And if *Star Wars* adventures are your pleasure, this is true to form.



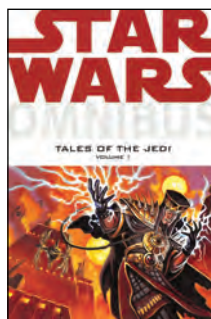
STAR WARS OMNIBUS: TALES OF THE JEDI VOLUME

Format: Omnibus
Publisher: Dark Horse Books
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: R249

OVER 400 PAGES OF swishy, flashy, Jedi action. Set five thousand years before Skywalker popped the Death Star, the omnibus contains the complete story arcs of the 'The Golden Age of the Sith', 'The Fall of the Sith Empire' and 'Knights of the Old Republic'. A lot of Sith action, especially when the Sith Lord Marka Ragnos (ruler of the galaxy back then, didya know) gets offed. This causes an ascension battle that spans pretty much the known galaxy, except the bits nobody cares about.

You could fill a whole Wookieepedia with the *Star Wars* stuff in the seven sub-series spanning Volume 1, and no doubt someone has. One such thing would be that contained within is the first work to show (at last, to the fans) the legendary eras of the Old Republic and the glory of the Jedi, only mentioned in passing in the movies. *Tales of the Jedi* was, not surprisingly, the inspiration for the *Knights of the Old Republic* game series.

Much like the *Aliens vs. Predator* and *Alien* collection, this is a fully-packed science-fiction action adventure and pretty much *Star Wars* fan pornography. The setting is vast, epic and has ample Hutt action for anyone who knows who the Hutts are. If you thought the movies were silly, a pox on you. If you want to know more about the pre-midichlorian epic that raised an entire generation to believe that a little wrinkled puppet is a Jedi master, buy this. This is the book you're looking for.



Y: THE LAST MAN BOOK 1

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Vertigo
Writer: Brian K. Vaughan
Artist: Pia Guerra
Price: R129.00

IN 2002, A VIRUS kills everything with a Y-chromosome. That means every male of every species just falls over dead. This 'gendercide' means the end of the world, unless a cure is found. But, as the title suggests, one man does survive. One man and his monkey, to be specific. Soon enough, he reveals his good fate to his mother, who is a US senator, and she teams him up with a special agent as bodyguard. The duo head out to find a certain doctor working on a cure. That is more or less the plot of this first collection of stories from a really excellent comic. *Y: The Last Man* is funny and serious, keeping a steady pace with lots of tense moments, action and several story lines entwining the fate of the last man alive. The book won an Eisner award for its writing, and the art complements that quite nicely. If you plan to embark on collecting a graphic novel series, this is a good choice.



FIGURINES



Broad: 80mm, Tall: 210mm

Rin Tohsaka

Series: Mon-sieur Bome (Collection Vol. 22)
Accessories: Stand
RRP: R349
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com



Broad: 100mm, Tall: 185mm

Jason Vorhees

Series: Cult Classics Hall of Fame
Accessories: Machete, Pickaxe, Spear, 2 x decapitated heads
RRP: R149
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com

Mr. Eko

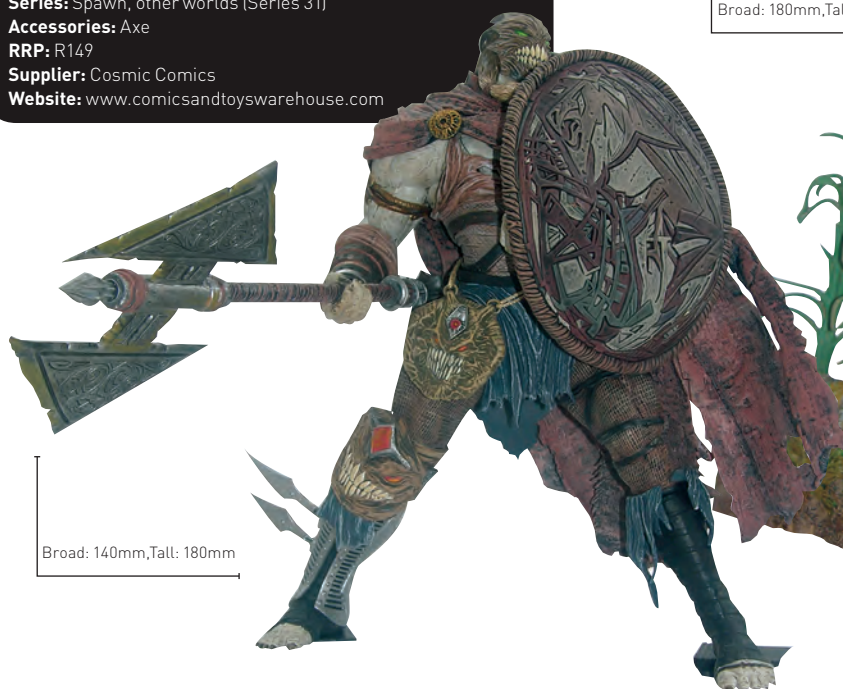
Series: Lost (Series 2)
Accessories: Plants, Base with voicebox
RRP: R199
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com

Broad: 180mm, Tall: 210mm



Lord Covenant

Series: Spawn, other worlds (Series 31)
Accessories: Axe
RRP: R149
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com



Broad: 140mm, Tall: 180mm

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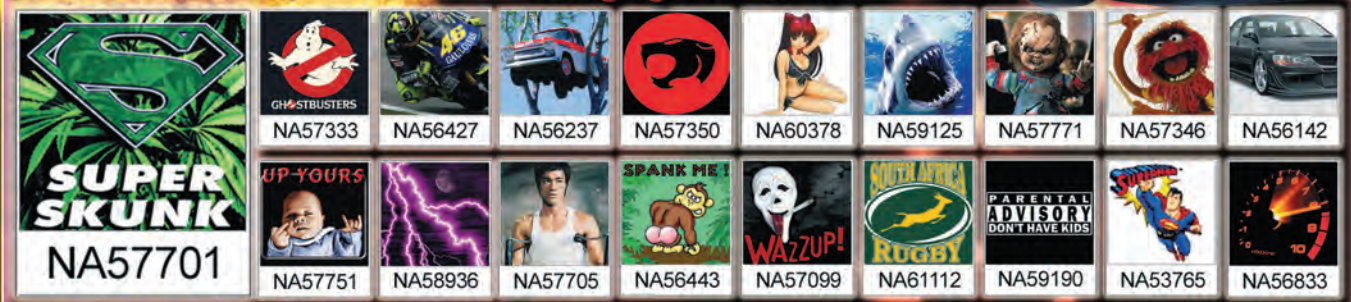
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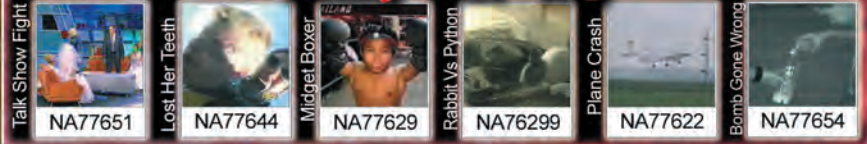
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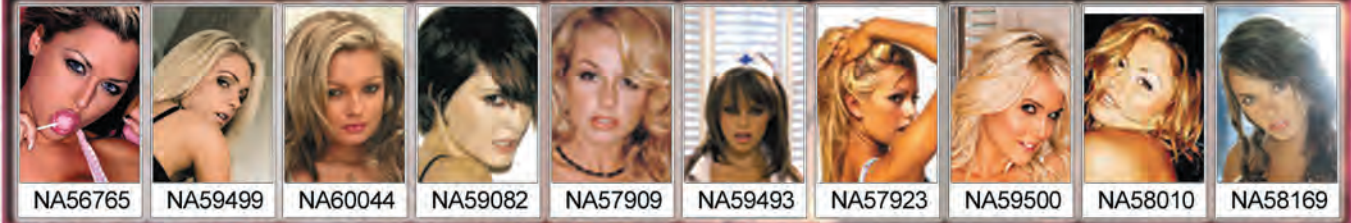
RingTones - R15

Polys	*CoverTones Artist/Title
NA35827	NA44055 RIHANNA FT ME'YO - HATE THAT I LOVE YOU
NA35935	NA44207 SEETHER - FAKE IT
NA35809	NA43994 TIMBALAND FT ONE REPUBLIC - APOLOGISE
NA35830	NA44056 IDA CORR VS FEDDE LE GRAND - LET ME THINK...
NA35888	NA44149 DAUGHTRY - OVER YOU
NA35874	NA44201 CRAIG DAVID - HOT STUFF (LET'S DANCE)
NA35944	NA44224 ROISIN MURPHY - LET ME KNOW
NA35828	NA44038 SHAYNE WARD - NO U HANG UP
NA35811	NA43996 ALICIA KEYS - ON ONE
NA35746	NA43925 J. HOLIDAY - BED
NA35786	NA43998 WYCLEF - SWEETEST GIRL (DOLLAR BILL)
NA35793	NA43978 BRITNEY SPEARS - GIMME MORE
NA35685	NA43669 50 CENT FT JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE - AYO TECHNOLOGY
NA35888	NA44149 DAUGHTRY - OVER YOU
NA35824	NA44052 LEONA LEWIS - BLEEDING LOVE
NA35918	--- SEAL - AMAZING
NA35806	NA43984 GWEN STEFANI - NOW THAT YOU GOT IT
NA35820	NA44051 WILLIAM - GOT IT FROM MY MAMA
NA35828	NA44038 SHAYNE WARD - NO U HANG UP
NA35957	NA44241 TOKIO HOTEL - READY, SET, GO!
NA35813	NA43997 KANYE WEST FT T-PAIN - GOOD LIFE
NA35756	NA43987 MARK RONSON FT AMY WINEHOUSE - VALERIE

Funny Vids - R15



Hot Babes - R15



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RAVEN'S LOFT



FUEL EFFICIENCY

WELCOME BACK. LAST MONTH we took a look at the strategic aspects of mana planning. This month, I'll discuss tactical considerations of how to use mana during the course of a game.

Being intimately familiar with your deck, and the nature of its mana curve, is essential. This will help you to take an educated guess at what you may be drawing into soon, and therefore what your mana requirements are going to be like. This will help you to use your mana efficiently: i.e. to get the most "bang for your buck" every turn. Using as much of your mana as possible (when you have productive things to do, of course!) is what mana efficiency is about. This is fairly abstract, so let's take a look at an example.

Let's say that you have four mana available, and a choice between three-casting-cost and two-casting-cost cards. If you want to drop these with equal priority, you generally want to try to use all four mana. Therefore, you play the two cheaper cards. The next turn you'll still have enough mana to play the three-casting-cost card, and if you have a land and draw a 2-CC card, or vice versa, you'll be able to play them both too. This last bit is where knowing your mana curve helps so much. This is a highly simplified example, but the principle holds true - often in ways that are more complex. (For example, if you have four mana and an ability that requires three mana to activate, it may be better to play a 1-CC card rather than a 2-CC card, thereby allowing you to activate the ability too. The next turn, you may get to drop a land and play the 2-CC and the ability.)

Of course, there are caveats. For example, when you are facing a blue mage and have reason to expect 'counter-magic', just going

balls to the wall is often going to get you into trouble. Here, instead of casting a 4-CC spell when you have four mana, it may be better to start off with the cheaper spells first, to give your opponent the option of burning a counter spell or letting your more minor, yet still very real, threat resolve. Also, by starting off with the cheaper spell, you may get your opponent to leave himself with too little mana for a second counter-spell, at which point you can resolve another spell. Another reason to not tap out when playing against a blue mage with untapped islands is that some counter-magic requires you to pay additional mana for your spell or see it countered: for example Rune Snag, Mana Leak and Broken Ambitions. If you suspect such a card to be in your opponent's grip, try to play spells that will leave you with enough spare mana to pay an additional premium.

Okay, this seems like a good time (seeing as we are pretty much on the subject already) to discuss ways to play around an opponent's counter-magic (though, being a blue mage myself, should I really be divulging such material?). Sitting across from 'permission' can be a very daunting experience, particularly for the relatively inexperienced player. The most important thing to remember is that counter-spells almost always trade with spells on a one-for-one basis. Each counter-spell is intended to negate one threat. If the counter-spell cannot be played when the threat is about to resolve, then it's too late. Decks with low mana curves (i.e. a predominance of cheap spells) tend to fare better against permission decks. Their threats tend to be cheaper than the blue mage's answers, so two things happen: firstly, a threat (sometimes two)

generally resolves before the blue mage has enough mana up for counter-magic; and secondly, it's possible for the blue mage's opponent to play more threats than the countermage can play counters in one turn. Therefore, if you each have six mana and you are sitting with three 2-CC threats, odds are that you'll be able to resolve one of these, as the countermage will most likely (though not necessarily!) only be able to counter twice (given that Cancel is the current baseline for hard counters). There's an interesting psychological nuance here: the blue mage will often let the first threat (assuming that it's minor) land on the grounds that there may be something juicier coming - perhaps assuming this is your attempt to 'tease out' a counter-spell. This can be taken advantage of: you can drop your average threat first, rather than your weakest, and hope that this happens. In addition, should it resolve, stop playing spells for the turn! Yes, this may appear inefficient, but it leaves your hand fuller with more fuel for a later barrage of multiple spells to try to overload the counter-magic with.

There's much more involved in dealing with counter-magic, but the most important thing to remember is that the blue mage is playing mind games with you: he wants you to become convinced that nothing you will try will work. Play the game right back at him, and make him worry about whether he has enough answers to your questions. You need to strike a balance between not being too shy, and not being too reckless with your spells.

Next month, I'll be taking a look at the new set, Morningtide, which will already be out by the time you read this. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

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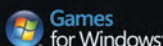
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